ARAMINTA

J. C. SNAITH

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/araminta00snaiuoft

ARAMINTA

LE
S669ar

ARAMINTA

BY

J. C. SNAITH

AUTHOR OF "WILLIAM JORDAN, JUNIOR," "BROKE OF COVENDEN," ETC.

196116
19.5.25

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
1909

COPYRIGHT, 1908, 1909, BY
THE FORUM PUBLISHING COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

Published, February, 1909
Second Printing, March, 1909
Third Printing, May, 1909
Fourth Printing, July, 1909

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Old Woman of Hill Street	1
II.	The Idea Which Came to Her	9
III.	Lord Cheriton Looks In	22
IV.	Arrival of the First Cause of All Romance	38
V.	The Instinct of Mr. Marchbanks Betrays Him	48
VI.	Unwarrantable Behavior of Tobias	66
VII.	A Throwback	80
VIII.	"Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough"	98
IX.	In Which Cheriton Drops His Umbrella	108
X.	Jim Lascelles Makes His Appearance	119
XI.	Miss Perry is the Soul of Discretion	140
XII.	Jim Lascelles Takes a Decisive Step	151
XIII.	High Revel is Held in Hill Street	161
XIV.	Ungentlemanlike Behavior of Jim Lascelles	171
XV.	Diplomacy is Called For	193
XVI.	Hyde Park	200
XVII.	Development of the Female Us	213
XVIII.	Fashion Comes to the Acacias	226
XIX.	A Social Triumph	243
XX.	Miss Perry Has Her Palm Crossed with Silver	256
XXI.	High Diplomacy	267

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	A Conversation at Ward's . . .	281
XXIII.	Muffin Makes Her Appearance at Pen-y-Gros Castle	292
XXIV.	Episode of a French Novel and a Red Umbrella	304
XXV.	Paris on Mount Ida	322
XXVI.	Jim Lascelles Adds Heroism to His Other Fine Qualities . .	334
XXVII.	Revel is Held at Pen-y-Gros Castle	348
XXVIII.	A Thunderbolt	365
XXIX.	Jim Lascelles Writes His Name in the Visitors' Book	375
XXX.	Good-by	383
XXXI.	Disintegration	392
XXXII.	Barne Moor	402
XXXIII.	Everything for the Best in the Best of All Possible Worlds .	410

ARAMINTA

CHAPTER I

THE OLD WOMAN OF HILL STREET

AN old lady who lived in Hill Street was making arrangements to enter upon her seventy-fourth year.

It was a quarter to nine in the morning by the ormolu clock on the chimney-piece; and the old lady, somewhat shriveled, very wide-awake, and in the absence of her toupee from the position it was accustomed to grace—at present it was in the center of the dressing-table—looking remarkably like a macaw, was sitting up in bed. Cushions supported her venerable form, and an Indian shawl, the gift of her Sovereign, covered her aged shoulders.

There were people who did not hesitate to describe her as a very worldly-minded, not to say very wicked, old lady. The former of these epithets there is none to dispute; in regard to the latter, let our silence honor the truth. It is far from our intention to asperse the character of one who has always passed as a Christian; nor do we ascribe to human frailty the sinister significance that some people do. But as

far as this old lady is concerned it is a point upon which we have no bigotry.

If sheer worldliness of mind is akin to wickedness, the old woman who lived in Hill Street must have come perilously near to that state. Her views upon all matters relating to this world were extremely robust, and years and experience had confirmed her in them. In regard to the next world she seldom expressed an opinion. In this she was doubtless wise. Sitting very upright in her bed, with those glittering eyes and hawk-like features the unmistakable mistress of all they surveyed, she was enough to strike the boldest heart with awe. Not that temerity was the long suit of Miss Burden, a gentlewoman of a certain age whose sole mission in life it was to do her good will and pleasure in return for board and residence, and forty pounds per annum paid quarterly.

Duly fortified with a slice of dry toast and a cup of very strong tea, the old lady said in such a clear and incisive tone that she must have studied the art of elocution in the days of her youth—

"Burden, cover my head."

The gentlewoman obeyed the command with delicacy and with dexterity. Yet it must not be thought that the elaborate mechanism which adorned the venerable poll fourteen hours out of the twenty-four was taken from the center of the dressing-table. It was not. Various ceremonies had to be performed before the moment arrived for its reception. In its place a temporary, but none the less marvelous, erection of fine needlework and point lace was produced by Miss

Burden, and arranged like a veritable canopy about the brow of Minerva.

"Admit Marchbanks," said the voice from the bed.

The door opened and that personage was ushered in. Mr. Marchbanks merits a description quite as much as his mistress. Yet how to do justice to him, that is the problem. The poise of his bearing, his urbane reserve, his patrician demeanor were those of an ambassador. His whole being was enveloped in an air of high diplomacy. His most trivial action seemed to raise the ghost of Lord John Russell. Like his venerable mistress, he was a Whig to the core. He had been born, he had been bred, and by the grace of God he was determined to die in that tradition.

Under the left arm of Mr. Marchbanks was the *Morning Post*, which organ of opinion had been warmed by his own hands. In his right hand he bore a small silver dish. Upon it was a little pile of rather important-looking correspondence.

With the courtly grace of a bygone age, Mr. Marchbanks bowed to the occupant of the four-poster—old ladies who live in Hill Street do not put their faith in new furniture—and his venerable mistress was pleased to say—

"Good morning, Marchbanks."

"Good morning, my lady," said Mr. Marchbanks very gravely; and then said he with a benevolence that would have made a considerable fortune in Harley Street: "I trust your ladyship has slept well."

"As well as one can expect at my age," said the occupant of the four-poster.

No, Mr. Marchbanks did not offer his venerable mistress many happy returns of her birthday. And to those of our readers who aspire to serve old ladies who live in Hill Street—and let us not be judged immodest if we express the belief that many who are inspired with this excellent ambition will be found among them—a word of warning may not be out of place. Let us urge these neophytes not to take the practice of Mr. Marchbanks for their guide. His eminence was the fruit of years. Remember he had been tipped by the Duke of Wellington. He had pulled down the coat collar of Lord Palmerston on more than one occasion; while as for Lord Granville, he knew him as well as he knew his own father.

"How is Ponto this morning?" inquired the occupant of the four-poster.

"In excellent spirits, my lady."

"And his appetite?"

"He has eaten a chicken, my lady, with excellent relish."

"Humph," said the occupant of the four-poster, "that dog eats as much as a Christian."

In the opinion of Mr. Marchbanks Ponto ate more, but he did not say so. He was content merely to bow and withdraw with simple yet ample dignity. The old lady read her letters and glanced at the Court Circular, the Parliamentary Report, and the Money Market. She then announced her intention of getting up. Over the divers things incident to this complex process it is doubtless well to draw the veil. Let it suffice that an hour and a half later she reached

her morning-room, a veritable dragon in black silk and a brown wig, leaning on an ebony walking-stick.

The normal condition of her temper was severe. "Acidulated to the verge of the morose," said those who had particular cause to respect it. A considerable, not to say representative body they were. On this wet morning of the early spring, this seventy-third annual commemoration of the most pregnant fact of her experience, her temper was so positively formidable that it smote the officers of her household with a feeling akin to dismay.

Various causes had contributed to the state of the barometer. For one thing that impertinent fellow Cheriton had issued his annual persiflage upon the subject of her birthday. It fell, it appeared, upon the first of April; a stroke of irony, in Cheriton's opinion, for which she had never quite been able to forgive her Creator. Then, again, if you came to think of it, what had existence to offer an old woman who had so long outlived her youth; who had neither kith nor kin of her own; who bored her friends; who rendered her dependents miserable; who was unable to take exercise; who distrusted doctors and despised the clergy: a praiser of past times who considered the present age all that it ought not to be?

Why should this old lady be in a good humor on her seventy-third birthday? She was a nuisance to everybody, including herself. She was a vain and selfish old woman, as all the world knew. Yet even she had her points. Everybody has to have points of

some kind, else they would never be allowed to persist—particularly to their seventy-fourth year.

For one thing she was good to her pug. Upon that extraordinarily repulsive and overfed animal she lavished a great deal of affection. Yet mark the ingratitude of the canine race. How did that misshapen, dumb, soulless, pampered beast, whose figurehead was like a gargoyle, and whose eyes were so swollen with baked meats that they could scarcely revolve, requite the constant care and caresses of his mistress? Why, by getting fat. There could be no doubt about it that Ponto was getting fat.

Almost the first thing the old woman did upon what was destined to prove one of the most memorable days of a long and not particularly useful life, was to issue an edict. It was to the effect that John, the second footman, was to exercise Ponto for an hour every morning in Hyde Park. The manner in which John, who himself consumed more than was good for a human being, received the edict is no concern of ours.

It was about a quarter to two—at least it was getting near luncheon-time—that the rare event happened from which springs the germ of this history. How it came to pass will never be known. It is a problem to baffle the most learned doctors and the most expert psychologists. For at about a quarter to two, just as Miss Burden had returned from a visit to the circulating library, the occurrence happened. The old lady of Hill Street was visited by an Idea. To be sure it did not reveal itself imme-

diately in that crude and startling guise. It had its processes to go through, like a cosmos or a tadpole, or any other natural phenomenon that burgeons into entity. The evolutions by which it attained to its fullness were in this wise.

"Where have you been, Burden?" said the old lady, fixing a cold eye upon the abashed blue-backed volume under the arm of her gentlewoman.

"I have been changing a novel at Mudie's," said Miss Burden.

"The usual rubbish, I suppose," said the old woman, giving a grim turn to her countenance, which rendered that frontispiece an admirable composite of a hawk and a hanging judge.

"Lord Cheriton said it was the best novel he had read for years," said Miss Burden with the gentle air of one who reveres authority.

"Humph," said the old lady. "Whatever Cheriton is, he has taste at least. Give it to me."

Miss Burden handed the blue-backed volume to her mistress. The old lady opened it warily, lest she should come too abruptly upon a fine moral sentiment.

"Man uses good English," she said suspiciously. "Reminds one of the man Disraeli before he made a fool of himself in politics."

The next thing that Miss Burden was aware of was that the old lady was fast asleep.

When Mr. Marchbanks came a few minutes later to announce that luncheon was ready, his mistress, with the blue-backed volume in her lap, was snoring

lustily. An anxious consultation followed. Her ladyship had not missed her luncheon for seventy-three years.

The far-seeing wisdom of Miss Burden—doubtless due in some measure to her pure taste in English fiction—was allowed to prevail. The state of the old woman's temper could not possibly be worse than it had been that morning if the sun was to remain faithful to the firmament. If she slept undisturbed it might conceivably be better.

Miss Burden was justified of her wisdom. The old lady missed her luncheon for the first time in seventy-three years. Ideas come to us fasting; and that is the only explanation there is to offer of how her Idea came to be born.

CHAPTER II

THE IDEA WHICH CAME TO HER

IT was a quarter to three when the old woman awoke. She was alone save for Ponto, her *fidus Achates*, who was snoring in front of the fire with his tail curled up in the most ridiculous manner. And yet she was not alone, for there is reason to believe that her Idea was already born in her. There can be little doubt that the Idea had sprung into being, even before she had time to turn, which she did almost immediately, to the half-pint of claret and the plate of goose liver pie that Miss Burden and Mr. Marchbanks in consultation had caused to be laid beside her.

Now do not suppose that the Idea was proclaimed forthwith in its meridian splendor. Nothing of the kind. It was still in its infancy. It had to be shaped and reshaped, to be dandled and cosseted, to be born and born again in the dim recesses of the mind, before it gathered the requisite force to issue as it were from the armory of Minerva.

At four o'clock precisely it was the custom of this old lady, if the light and the British climate permitted, to drive the whole length of Bond Street and once round Hyde Park.

At that hour the sky having cleared sufficiently

for the sun to make a tardy and shamefaced appearance, the old lady, accompanied by her faithful gentlewoman and her somnolent four-footed beast, entered the equipage that was drawn up before her door.

It was an extraordinary vehicle. It had yellow wheels and a curious round body, which, according to scale, was very nearly as fat as Ponto's. It was perched up on very high springs, and was in the forefront of the fashion about the year 1841.

Mr. Bryant and Mr. Gregory, who shared the box-seat, would doubtless have been in the forefront of the fashion about the same period. Their broad backs, their box-cloth, the shape and texture of their hats and the angle at which they wore them unmistakably belonged to a very early period of the world's history. No, they did not wear side whiskers. We don't know why. Perhaps it was that side whiskers were either a little in front or a little behind the mode in 1841. But it is enough that Mr. Bryant and Mr. Gregory did not wear them. And had they worn them, had the present biographer had reason for one single moment to suspect that Messrs. Bryant and Gregory had been in possession of these appendages, he would have given up this history. Really the line has to be drawn somewhere.

The progress along Bond Street was at the rate of two miles an hour. The horses, Castor and Pollux by name, were very fat and very somnolent, the yellow chariot was very unwieldy, and in the language of Constable X, who touched his helmet at

the corner of Hanover Square, "it took up a deal o' room." None the less the progress of the vehicle was almost royal.

The old lady sat very upright in the center of the best seat, which she had all to herself. With a nose of the Wellington pattern and a chin to match, displayed under a canopy of feathers, she looked more like a macaw than ever. Miss Burden, in charge of Ponto and a pair of folders with a tortoiseshell handle, was seated opposite at a more modest elevation.

Every member of the male sex whom this redoubtable veteran chanced to meet, who had the good fortune to wear his clothes with a sufficient air of distinction, received a bow from her; and in return she was the recipient of some highly elaborate and wholly inimitable courtesies. With these she ranked as "an agreeable old woman."

With the members of the other sex, which socially the more critical, who seated in their barouches, their victorias, their broughams, and their motors, who inclined their own distinguished heads from under their own barbaric canopies, yet with no vain strivings in the direction of effusiveness, she was greeted with a half-veiled hostility of the eyelids, and a whispered, "There goes that old cat."

We offer no opinion on the justice or the taste of the remark. We claim no learning in feminology. Why these ladies, each of whom vied with the other in the propagation of good works, each of whom was an honored patroness of more than one institution

for the amelioration of the human race, should apply such a figure of speech to one who was old and venerable it is not for us to conjecture.

Did they refer to the quantity of feathers she was wearing upon her helmet? If so, since April 1, 183–, she had caused many a beautiful and harmless bird to be destroyed. But then they themselves were wearing similar great canopies of feathers. Did they refer to her features? We think not, for although her nose was shaped like a talon of a bird of prey, they were not conspicuously feline. Perhaps it was that they referred to her personal character. At any rate they are known to be high authorities upon such a matter as the human character, and as a rule are very searching in their judgments. Certainly the old lady proceeding along Bond Street in her yellow chariot at the rate of two miles an hour had done a fair amount of mischief in her time; and if health and strength continued to be vouchsafed to her by an All-wise Creator, before she died she hoped to do a good deal more.

In her own little corner of her own little parish no old lady was more respected. Where she was not respected she was feared, and where she was neither respected nor feared she was very heartily hated. Of one thing we are sure. There was not a living creature who loved her, unless it was Ponto, who being a creature without a soul was denied the consolations of religion.

We don't believe for a moment that Miss Burden loved her. She had caused her faithful gentlewoman,

who in the space of twenty years had given all she had had of youth, beauty, and gayety in return for board and residence and forty pounds per annum, paid quarterly, to weep too many tears in the privacy of her chamber for such a sacred emotion as love to requite her persecutor. Yet it is far from our intention to dogmatize upon the female heart. If we do we are sure to be wrong. That complex and wonderful mechanism has defeated us too often. Therefore it is possible that Miss Burden hugged her chains to her bosom and lavished the poetry pent up in her soul upon the hand that chastened her. We say it is possible, but we protest that it is hardly likely. Yet do not let us express a positive opinion upon the emotional apparatus of even Miss Burden, who, whatever else she might be, was a woman and a gentlewoman and the thirteenth daughter of a rural dean.

It is really no use trying to hide the fact that the old lady in the yellow chariot had in the course of her seventy-three summers wrought a great deal of misery and unhappiness among her fellow-creatures. Nobody's reputation was safe in her keeping. She never said a kind word of anybody if she could possibly help it; and although she may have done good by stealth she very seldom did it in the light of day. Yet there can be little doubt that Ponto loved her in his dumb way, and there is every reason to believe that Mr. Marchbanks respected her immensely.

Proceeding along Bond Street with her Idea—she had not forgotten it, and you must not forget it

either—she continued to evolve that mysterious phantasm in the grim purlieus of her hard yet not capacious mind. Sitting very upright in the center of her yellow chariot, bleakly indifferent to those who did not interest her, and coldly overlooking those who did, this old woman in her marvelous equipage had come almost alongside the little shop on the left going towards Piccadilly where you can get the nicest silk hat in London, of which we forget the name, when she beheld an apparition.

It was a Hat. It was of gray felt with a dent in the middle and rather wide in the brims, of the variety which is called a Homburg because it is worn at Cannes. Round this article of masculine attire, in itself sufficiently bizarre, was what is technically known as "a Guards' ribbon." Those who are acquainted with the merits of this decorative emblem will not thank us for describing them; while those who are not will be unable to appreciate the special texture of their excellence from a mere categorical statement. Let it suffice that the old lady in the yellow chariot beheld a Homburg hat with a Guards' ribbon approaching at the rate of one mile an hour.

Now there was only one individual, not in London only, but in the whole of what at that time ranked as the civilized world (circa 190–), who by any concatenation of events could possibly be seen walking in Bond Street in a Homburg hat with a Guards' ribbon on April the first. Messrs. Bryant and Gregory knew that quite as well as their mistress. Therefore, quite naturally and properly, the yellow chariot came to a

stand automatically, just as the Hat came to a stand also, immediately opposite the coat of arms on the near side panel of this wonderful equipage, which itself was immediately opposite the little shop where you can get the nicest silk hat in London.

We wish our readers could have seen the manner in which Mr. Bryant and Mr. Gregory each removed his own headgear (circa 1841), in an act of homage to the Hat of Hats. We feel sure it would have reconciled them to a number of things they are likely to find in this history.

"How d'ye do, George?" said the old lady.

Now that form of salutation may mean much or it may mean little. With the occupant of the yellow chariot it meant the former. She only said, "How d'ye do?" to the highest branch of the peerage.

"How d'ye do, George?" said the occupant of the yellow chariot.

"Pooty well for an old 'un," said the owner of the Hat in a gruff, fat voice.

"How old *are* you?" said the occupant of the chariot.

"Nearly as old as you," said the Hatted one. Then said he with slow and gruff solemnity: "Many happy returns of your birthday, Caroline. It is a great pleasure to see you looking so well."

"Thank you, George," said the old lady with formidable politeness. "Regular habits and a good conscience are worth something when you get past seventy."

George Betterton, Duke of Brancaster, began to

gobble like a turkey. He was a heavy-jowled, purple-faced, apoplectic-looking individual, rather wide in stature and extremely short in the neck. So famous was he for his powers of emulation of the pride of the farmyard, that he went by the name of "Gobo" among his friends. As his habits were not so regular and his conscience was not so chaste as they might have been, George Betterton grew redder in the jowl than ever, and rolled his full-blooded eyes at the occupant of the yellow chariot.

"Something been crossing you, Caroline?" inquired her old crony, in his heavy, slow-witted way.

"Yes and no," said the occupant of the chariot with that bluntness of speech in which none excelled her. "Ponto is getting fat, and Burden is getting tiresome, and Cheriton has been insolent, and I am tired of life; but I intend to hold on some time yet just to spite people. It is all the better for the world to have an old nuisance or two in it."

This philanthropic resolution did not appear to arouse as much enthusiasm in George Betterton as perhaps it ought to have done. All the same he was very polite in his gruff, stolid, John Bull manner.

"Glad to hear it, Caroline," said he. "We should never get on, you know, without your old standards."

"Rubbish," said the old lady robustly. "You would only be too pleased to. But you won't at present, so make your mind easy."

The occupant of the yellow chariot flung up her nostrils as if to challenge high heaven with a snuff of scorn.

"What are you doing in London?" said the old lady. "That woman is at Biarritz, they tell me."

George Betterton pondered a moment and measured his old friend with his full-blooded eye.

"I've come up to judge the dog show," said he.

"Oh, is there a dog show?" said the old lady, upon a note of interest she seldom achieved. "When is it?"

"A week a' Toosday," said the owner of the hat.

We apologize to our readers, but if you belong to the highest branch of the peerage you have no need to be the slave of grammar.

"If I send Ponto," said the old lady, "will you guarantee him a prize?"

"First prize," said her old friend.

"Look at him well so that you will know him again. Burden, let the Dook look at Ponto."

"I've seen him so often," said George Betterton plaintively, as that overfed quadruped leered at him biliously. "He's a ducky little dog."

"Don't forget that American creature that Towcaster married has the effrontery to have one just like him. If you confuse him with hers I shall not forgive you."

"Better tie a piece o' bloo ribbon round his tail," said George.

His grace of Brancaster turned upon his heel.

"Remember my Wednesday," the old lady called after him in stentorian tones.

Whether George Betterton heard her or whether he did not it is doubtless well not to inquire. It is

rather a failing with high personages that they are apt to be afflicted with a sudden and unaccountable deafness. The old lady's voice could be heard at the other side of Bond Street, but her old acquaintance made no sign whatever that it had penetrated to him.

The yellow chariot moved on. Its occupant, looking exceedingly grim, and more than ever like a Gorgon or a dragon born out of due time, immediately proceeded to cut dead the inoffensive widow of a Baron in Equity who with her two pretty daughters was driving to the Grosvenor Galleries.

If there were those who could be deaf to her, there were also those to whom she could be blind. There can be no doubt that during the course of her long life she had had things far more her own way than is good for any human creature. But there were now those who were beginning openly to rebel from her despotic sway. George Betterton was not the only person who of late had been afflicted with deafness.

All the same, if the aspect of this old woman meant anything it was that its possessor had to be reckoned with. It had often been remarked by those of her friends who followed "the fancy," that in certain aspects it bore a striking resemblance to that of an eminent pugilist. It was a very tight and hard and arbitrary mouth, and a general demeanor of perfectly ruthless sarcasm that returned to Hill Street at a quarter to five. The rebels must be brought to heel.

The redoubtable Caroline had been home about an hour, when suddenly, without any sort of warning.

the Idea assumed an actual and visible guise. She was in the middle of a game of piquet, a daily exercise, Sundays excepted, in which she showed the greatest proficiency, which generally ended in the almost total annihilation of her adversary. Having "rubiconed" her gentlewoman, and having mulcted her in the sum of two shillings which Miss Burden could ill afford to lose, her Idea burst from its shell and walked abroad.

"Burden," said the old lady, "do you remember the name of the person that was married by my sister Polly?"

Miss Burden was so much startled by the question that she could not answer immediately. Not only was its abruptness highly disconcerting, but its nature was even more so. It dealt with one outside the pale.

"Per-Perring—Perkins," floundered Miss Burden. It was a name never mentioned in Hill Street upon any pretext whatever.

"Look it up in Walford."

Miss Burden consulted that invaluable work of reference. With some difficulty and many misgivings she was presently able to disinter the following:—

Perry Aloysius, clerk in holy orders, master of arts. Eldest surviving son of Reverend John Tillotson Perry and Maria, 2nd daughter of Montague Hawley esquire. Born 1842. Married Mary Augusta, younger daughter of Charles William Wargrave, third duke of Dorset, and Caroline daughter of 5th marquis of Twickenham. Incumbent of Saint Euthanasius Slocum

Magna and perpetual curate of Widdiford parish church. Heir S., Richard Aloysius Wargrave Perry, clerk in holy orders, bachelor of arts. Address, The Parsonage Slocum Magna, North Devon.

When the old lady had been duly acquainted with these facts she knitted her brows, pondered deeply and said "Humph!" A pause followed, and then a look of resolution settled upon her grim countenance.

"Burden," said she, "I am going to try an experiment. I shall write to that man."

In that apparently simple sentence was embodied the old lady's Idea in the fullness of its splendor. For the first time in her life or in his she deigned to recognize the existence of the Reverend Aloysius Perry.

The recognition duly dictated to the gentlewoman assumed the following shape:—

"*The Countess of Crewkerne presents her compliments to the Reverend Perry. Lady Crewkerne will be pleased to adopt a girl of her late sister's. Lady Crewkerne would suggest in the event of this course being agreeable to the Reverend Perry, that the most refined and mannerly of her late sister's children be forwarded to her.*"

"Get my spectacles, Burden," said the old woman, grimly. "I will read it myself."

It is perhaps too much to say that a tear stood in

the kind eyes of the gentlewoman when she rose to obey this behest. But certainly a long-drawn sigh escaped her, and the beating of her heart was quickened. The coming of a third person would at least help to relieve the tedium of that establishment.

The old woman read her letter with patience and with cynicism.

"It will serve," said she. "Send it immediately."

And then, as they say in the best fiction, a strange thing happened. The most natural and becoming course for Miss Burden to take was to ring the bell, in order that this curious document might be dispatched by a servant. But she did not do this. In her own person Miss Burden went forth of the room, and without waiting to put on her hat she passed out at the hall door, and with her own hand dropped the letter in the pillar-box opposite.

CHAPTER III

LORD CHERITON LOOKS IN

THREE days later there was delivered in Hill Street a letter bearing the west-country postmark. It was written in narrow, upright characters, which seemed to bear a shade of defiance in them. The envelope was inscribed with some formality to the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne, yet its shape was unfashionable, the paper was of inferior quality, and was innocent of any sort of adornment.

When this document was borne upon the silver dish by Mr. Marchbanks to the chamber of his aged mistress, and delivered to her in the sanctity of her four-poster, there was a slight flicker of the eyelids of that elderly diplomatist. It was as though with the *flair* that always distinguished him, he had come to divine that a great event was in the air.

The conduct of his mistress added weight to this theory. No sooner did she observe this commonplace missive to be nestling among those more ornate communications emanating, as Mr. Marchbanks knew perfectly well, from dukes and marquises and earls, and the ladies of dukes and marquises and earls, than she swooped down upon it for all the world as some old eagle might have done with outstretched talon. She read as follows:—

The Revd Aloysius Perry has the honor to present his compliments to the Countess of Crewkerne, and begs to say in response to her request that he is forwarding to-morrow (Tuesday) per passenger train, his second daughter Araminta, who in his humble judgment is the most attractive of those with which it has pleased Providence to endow him.

The old lady, propped up in her four-poster, honored this communication with two readings and with a knitted brow. She was a very sharp-witted old woman, as we are constantly having to remark, and she could not quite make up her mind whether the unconventional flavor that clung to the letter of the man that had been married by her sister Polly was the fruit of conscious irony or of *bona fide* rusticity.

"Humph," said she, her invariable exclamation when in doubt about anything. "An underbred person, I am afraid."

She flung the cause of her uncertainty across the counterpane to her gentlewoman with a contemptuous gesture.

"It is an experiment," said she. "I dare say it is not wise for a woman of my age to add to her responsibilities. We shall see. At any rate, Burden, you are getting tiresome, and Ponto is getting fat."

"I feel sure she will be a sweet girl," Miss Burden ventured to say.

"Why do you think so?"

"Girlhood is so delightful," said Miss Burden. "All young things are so adorable."

"Burden," said the old lady, ruthlessly, "you are a fool."

Miss Burden blushed faintly, as she always did when her birthright was applied to her scornfully. Yet it was a trial she had had daily to endure for many years past. She had been called a fool so often that she had come to believe that she was one. And that is the kind of belief that renders the human lot very hard. The faint tinge of shame that dyed the cheek of the poor, sensitive, downtrodden dependent was the sign manual of something that lay too deep for tears.

"It is a dangerous experiment," said the old lady. "At my age I ought to know better than to try experiments. I hope the creature will be decently bred."

"Surely, dear Lady Crewkerne," said Miss Burden, "a girl of poor dear Lady Augusta's can hardly fail to be that."

"The father is quite a common man; a person of no particular family. And, unfortunately, girls take after their fathers."

"I feel sure the husband of dear Lady Augusta is a gentleman."

"Burden," said the old lady, ruthlessly, "you are a born fool. Ring the bell. It is time I had my massage."

During the course of the morning Caroline Crew-

kerne's oldest friend looked in to pass the time of day with her. He stayed to luncheon.

Cheriton was one of those men whose mission in life it is to appear on all occasions and in every season as one apart from the vulgar herd. There can be no doubt that he succeeded in this laudable ambition. His corsets were not to everybody's taste, and there were also those who did not care greatly for the color of his wig and the way in which he wore it. Its hue was as the raven's, abundant in texture and arranged low on the forehead in the form of a fringe. But Caroline Crewkerne's judgment of her old gossip was the correct one. Whatever Cheriton was or whatever he was not, emphatically he was not a fool. Had he been in any sort oppressed by that not unamiable form of human weakness the redoubtable Caroline would have been very quick to expose it. In a matter of that kind no one could have had a keener or more uncompromising instinct. They knew each other so well, they had crossed swords so often, each derived so much zest from the display of the other's dexterity, that while interpreting one another with a frankness that less robust persons might have found almost brutal, it had respect for a mutual basis.

To Cheriton's credit let it be written, he was an admirer of women. If they were pretty his admiration was apt to increase. If a character of quite singular merit had its vulnerable point—and I do not positively assert that it had—it was perhaps to be found in his dealings with the most attractive mem-

bers of what has always been allowed to be a most attractive institution.

To the whole of that sex, however, it was his wont to be extraordinarily polite, charming, supple, and attentive. No one could call Miss Burden supremely attractive. She had so many things against her, including the immediate loss of her place had she developed any special powers in this direction. But she had long been Lord Cheriton's devoted slave and adherent. It was merely the result of his way with the whole of womankind. Young or old, fair or ugly, it made no difference. An air of deferential pleasantness, of candid homage so lightly touched with sarcasm that it passed for whimsicality, was extended towards all who bore the name of woman, whether it was Caroline Crewkerne herself, her penniless dependent, or the old flower-seller at the top of the Haymarket. His grace of demeanor and his slightly ironical *bonhomie* were at the service of each of them equally.

It is not too much to say that Miss Burden adored Lord Cheriton. Not openly, of course, not in the broad light of day; but there can be little doubt that had the occasion ever arisen she would gladly have yielded her life for this handsome, deferential, finely preserved nobleman of five and sixty. Nor is it a matter to be wondered at. Although she was a well-read woman with an excellent taste of her own, he made out her circulating-library lists for her; he invariably had a bunch of violets to offer her, or any other simple flower that was in season; he took a gen-

uine interest in the condition of her health; and further there was every reason to suspect that in his heart of hearts he shared her intense dislike of Ponto, who had very rudimentary ideas indeed of the deference due to light-gray trousers.

"Cheriton," said the old lady, as soon as they were seated at luncheon, "did you know that George Betterton was in London?"

The pair of old gossips looked one another in the face with an air of demure innocence.

"And she at Biarritz," said Cheriton, musically.

The old lady bent across the table with the gesture of a sibyl.

"Mark my words," said she. "The *régime* is at an end."

"I never prophesy in these cases," said Cheriton. "She is a very able woman, which of course is not surprising, and George is the incarnation of sheer stupidity, which is not surprising either. All the same, Caroline, I don't say you are not right."

"Of course I am right," said Caroline Crewkerne, robustly. "And I put it to you, Cheriton, what will be the next move upon the *tapis?*"

"George will marry," said Cheriton, tentatively.

"Precisely," said the old woman, nodding her head in sage approval.

"Have you selected a duchess for him?"

"Why do you ask?" said the old lady, with an air of diplomacy which amused Cheriton, because it was so unnecessary.

"I ask merely for information. If I were a sport-

ing tipster, Priscilla Lestrange would be my selection."

"No," said Caroline Crewkerne, with immense decision, "a man never marries a woman as stupid as himself. Nature's an old fool, but she knows better than that."

Cheriton pondered this philosophical statement with a sagacious smile. Caroline's air, however, was so pontifical that it was not for his sex to dissent from it.

"Well, there is a great amount of stupidity in the world," said he, "and it seems to be increasing. By the way, was George sober?"

"He was holding himself very erectly, and he was walking very slowly."

"Then I am afraid he wasn't. But it must be the most tedious thing out to spend one's life in losing one's money at cards and in criticising the Militia."

"Yes," said the old lady. "I share your opinion that it is time George began to pay attention to more permanent things."

"The Militia is always with us."

"I meant spiritual things, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, whose day-of-judgment demeanor nearly choked his lordship.

"George Betterton," said he, "has the spirituality of a wheelbarrow. It will give me great pleasure to be present when the subject is mentioned."

"He is coming to my Wednesday," said the old lady. "I shall speak to him then. That reminds me that Mary Ann Farquhar says this new Lancashire

bishop eats his cheese in the old-fashioned manner and he is now in London. If I knew his address I would send him a card."

"The Carlton Hotel," said Cheriton, "is the head-quarters of the Church in London."

"Burden," said the old lady, "make a note of that."

With an ostentation that Caroline Crewkerne considered wholly unnecessary, Cheriton inscribed this important contribution to sociology on the tablets of the gentlewoman. "What new game is the old heathen going to play, I wonder?" was the question that passed through his mind as he did so.

"What was Gobo doing in the parish?" inquired Cheriton. "Come to worry the War Office as usual?"

"No," said the old lady, "he seemed more serious than usual, but that may have been drink. As I am showing Ponto at the dog show on Tuesday week, George has consented to award the prizes. I have chosen a silver collar with his name inscribed suitably. I don't know anything more becoming than a silver collar for a dog of Ponto's type."

"I am afraid it's a job; and don't forget, my dear Caroline, the last one you perpetrated did no good to the country."

"What do you mean, Cheriton?" said the old lady, with her bristles going up like a badger. "Have the goodness to explain your meaning."

"That boy from Eton—your *protégé*—whom you sent out to South Africa to command a brigade, made a dooce of a hash of it, they tell me."

"That is a lie, Cheriton, and you know it," said the old lady, whose voice quivered so much with passion that it frightened Miss Burden considerably. "Poor dear Arthur once told me himself that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton."

"It is your thoughtlessness, my dear Caroline, in taking for gospel the senile speeches of an old fogy who lived far longer than he ought to have done, that has so nearly cost us a continent. The playing-fields of Eton forsooth!"

"Cheriton," said the old lady, "I despise you."

The light of battle was in her eye. It is hardly correct to speak of their crossing swords. The weapons they used were cudgels, in the use of which they were very expert.

Miss Burden was not a little shocked and affrighted. But she had witnessed so many exhibitions of a similar character between these combatants, who fully enjoyed a rough and tumble whenever they met, that I am by no means sure that the gentlewoman's fear was not in the nature of a pleasant emotion. It seems to be right and proper that a gentlewoman shall derive a legitimate pride from being shocked and affrighted. At least it used to be so in that bright and glad heyday of decorum before some person unknown invented a hockey stick to beat out the brains of female sensibility.

It was not until they were drinking coffee in the seclusion of her ladyship's boudoir that peace was restored between the combatants. They had both

appeared to advantage, for they had had long practice in all kinds of verbal warfare. Cheriton's phrases, by long association with the great world, were as direct as possible. He called a spade a spade, but his manner of so doing was extremely charming. Miss Burden thought his most incisive speeches were full of melody. As for Caroline Crewkerne, she was the sharpest-tongued old woman in London. And the least scrupulous, said the very considerable body who had been flayed by it.

Peace restored, the old lady made an abrupt suggestion.

"Cheriton," said she, "it has occurred to me that it is time you settled down. You ought to marry."

"Cherchez la femme," said Cheriton, with a lightness of tone that ill became him.

"If you will place the matter in my hands," said Caroline Crewkerne, "I shall be happy to do what I can for you."

"I am overwhelmed."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said Caroline, sharply. "Let us take a broad view of the subject and let us place it on a matter-of-fact basis. I repeat, in my opinion you ought to marry."

"Pourquoi?"

"In the first place," said the old woman, ruthlessly, "you are not quite what you were. Five-and-sixty is—well, five-and-sixty. It is no use disguising the fact that young and attractive women are a little inclined to smile at you."

Cheriton writhed. Rather pitifully he raised a

hollow guffaw. It was perhaps the worst thing he could have done in the circumstances; but the poor butterfly, when the pin is through its middle, is prone to augment its own tortures by twisting its body and flapping its wings. Caroline Crewkerne smiled grimly.

"The fact is, Cheriton," said she, "you have grown already a little *passé* for the *rôle* of Phœbus Apollo. Understand the phrase is not mine. It was whispered in my ear by an insolent girl who looks upon you in the light of a grandfather."

Cheriton mopped his perspiring features with a yellow silk handkerchief. He conducted this operation very delicately because his cheeks were flushed with a carmine that was apt to run all over the place.

"I have heard a complaint of your mustache," said his old friend. "In my opinion it requires careful treatment. At present it does not harmonize with your general scheme of color. When did you dye it last?"

"The same day on which you last dyed your hair, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, rather laboriously. "As they both belong to the same period, I thought it right to——"

"Don't explain at length," said Caroline. "I dye my hair weekly. But what I want to point out to you is this. In my opinion it is quite time you were married. You are rich. It is almost a national scandal that there is no entertaining at Cheriton House; and the title reverts to a branch of the family you

don't esteem. Surely there is to be found in the world some youngish person of modest attractions—do not delude yourself, Cheriton, that you can ask for more—to whom you can offer a vocation."

"There is a little actress at the Gayety," said Cheriton, thoughtfully. "She seems a healthy creature. I dare say she——"

"Burden, quit the room," said the old lady.

Blushing like a peony and trembling like an aspen—a double feat of which gentlewomen nurtured in the best Victorian traditions were always capable—Miss Burden obeyed.

Cheriton closed the door.

"Yes, I dare say she would," said Caroline Crewkerne, with her hanging-judge demeanor. "All the same, Cheriton, you talk like a fool."

What Caroline Crewkerne said to Cheriton, and what Cheriton said to Caroline Crewkerne, I shall not set down. The plain truth is, I dare not. She was a survival of a famous aristocracy which was never accustomed to mince its language. She had always been used, as her Georgian forbears had before her, to call a spade a spade. It was a mark of caste. And Cheriton, too, beneath his superficial airs and dandified graces, which had earned for him the title of "the last of the macaronis," which really meant nothing at all, had a strain of the most uncompromising frankness.

Really I must apologize to my readers for these two old and hardened worldlings. I hope they will make all the allowance that is possible, for whatever

the pretensions of one of them, neither was inclined to view the great institution we call Woman at all romantically. Cheriton would certainly have rebutted the charge with scorn, but none the less it is perfectly just. His affectation of delicacy was only skin deep. Had a third person overheard their conversation without being furnished with the key to it, he would have concluded that it had to do with the bringing into the world of a pedigree horse, a thoroughbred dog, a prize cow, or a speckled rhinoceros. And he must have wondered how it was that two persons who had obviously moved in good society from their youth up, could sit *tête-à-tête* in a beautiful room in one of the most fashionable thoroughfares in all London, discoursing with remarkable point and gusto upon a subject which would have befitted a couple of yokels in a farmyard.

"There's my niece," said Caroline Crewkerne.

"Have you a niece?" said Cheriton.

"A girl of Polly's. You remember Polly?"

"Polly was a very plain woman," said Cheriton, slowly. "I think, take her altogether, she was the plainest woman I ever saw."

"It is odd," said Caroline, "that I had all the good looks as well as all the brains. It made life so difficult for Polly. Yet I think her heart was better than mine."

"Yes, Caroline, I think so," said Cheriton, assenting gracefully. "But I don't seem to remember Polly's marriage."

"It was not a marriage."

"No?" said Cheriton, with a sudden access of interest which was open to misinterpretation.

"Polly married the village curate, who hadn't a shilling."

"Poor devil."

"To which of the contracting parties do you refer?" said Caroline, incisively.

"Must have been a poor devil if he hadn't a shilling."

"Of course," said Caroline, "the Family never forgave her. Dearest papa forbade her the neighborhood. He might have forgiven the village, and he might have forgiven the curacy, but he could not forgive the shilling."

"Naturally," said Cheriton. "But I've known parsons' daughters turn out very well before now. I've seen one or two who looked capital in the Gayety chorus. What's the age of the gal?"

"Nineteen."

"An alluring period. Has she a good disposition?"

"She is my niece," said Caroline, with admirable succinctness.

"I shall come and see her. When is she on view?"

Caroline Crewkerne enfolded herself in her mantle of high diplomacy. She paused to measure Cheriton with that hawk-like eye of hers.

"A month to-morrow."

"Capital," said Cheriton.

He rose at his leisure.

" So long, Caroline," said he. " It is a great pleasure to find you so fit."

Caroline gave him a withered talon.

" Get another wig," said she. " And consult a specialist about your mustache."

" What, for a parson's daughter!"

" A duke's granddaughter," said the imperious Caroline.

" I'm damned if I do," said Cheriton, amiably.

" You are damned if you don't," said Caroline, making the obvious retort which is so apt to be mistaken for wit, and fixing an eye upon him that was positively arctic. " That is, if the creature is worth her salt."

" You are doubtless correct, Caroline," said Cheriton, with the air of a man who made a god of reason. " You have a good head. If only your heart——!"

With a bow and a smile, which had wrought great havoc in their time, although to some they had a certain pathos now, Cheriton withdrew. He pointed a course towards a famous shop at the corner of Burlington Gardens.

" It is quite true what they say," this nobleman of distinguished appearance and open manners might have been heard to mutter to high heaven, as he gazed upwards to inquire of Jove whether he intended to ruin his hat. " She *is* the most disagreeable old woman in London."

However, there is always the reverse of the medal, the other side to the picture. This handsome, courtly

and carefully-preserved specimen had been somewhat badly mauled no doubt by the old lioness. But had he been endowed with eyes in the back of his head, or been gifted with some occult faculty, he would have found a salve for his wounds. For his exit from the house in Hill Street was marked by a mildly ascetic form which was efficiently and discreetly veiled amid the curtains of the dining-room windows. Could he have been conscious of the eyes that were concentrated upon the back of his gracefully erect and faultlessly tailored exterior; could he by some special process of the mind have ravished the secrets of that chaste yet susceptible bosom, he would have been assured that it is not always necessary to invoke the black arts of the perruquier to recommend one's self to the mind and heart of a Christian gentlewoman. Had Lord Cheriton cut off his mustache as a Lenten sacrifice—which we regret to say was not at all likely, as there is reason to fear he did not respect the Church sufficiently to contemplate such a course of action—or had he been as bald as an egg, which Caroline Crewkerne declared he certainly was, within the sanctity of Miss Burden's breast there would still only have reigned the image of one perfect man, of one true prince.

CHAPTER IV

ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CAUSE OF ALL ROMANCE

WRAPPED in these reflections that we have dared to disclose, Miss Burden was oblivious of the fact that an old woman leaning upon an ebony stick, and accompanied by the roundest of all possible dogs, with the curliest of all possible tails, had entered the room. With a somewhat cruel abruptness she was made aware of that fact.

" Burden, don't be a fool," said a voice that was full of hard sarcasm. " Come away from that window immediately."

In dire confusion Miss Burden endeavored to disentangle herself from the folds of the window curtains.

" That man is as hollow as a drum," said the old woman, with a comprehensive wave of her walking-stick, " and as vain as a peacock. Where is your self-respect, Burden? A person of your age, position, and appearance—it is indecent."

Miss Burden was prepared to swoon. Fifty years earlier in the world's history there is reason to believe she would have done so. But even the emotional apparatus of a Christian gentlewoman is susceptible to streams of tendency. Swoons are seldom indulged in in these days by the best and most sensi-

tive people. Therefore Miss Burden was content to blush guiltily, to droop her head, and to hoist a hunted look in her mild gray eyes that was really charming.

"Burden," said the old woman, sternly, "where is your list for the circulating library? I shall have to supervise your reading. It is exercising a pernicious influence upon your mind and character."

Miss Burden produced the list from the recesses of the small wallet which she bore suspended from her waist.

"Precisely as I thought," said the old lady, with a snort. "Novels, novels, novels! And by male writers. For some time past, Burden, it has been plain to me that an influence has been at work which has been undermining your sense of delicacy. 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' by George Meredith. Cross it out. Substitute Mrs. Turner's 'Cautionary Stories.' 'The Dolly Dialogues,' by Anthony Hope. Cross it out. Substitute 'The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.' 'An Old Maid's Love Story,' by Anon. Cross it out. Substitute 'The Pleasures of Life,' by Lord Avebury. 'L'Abbé Constantin,' by ——! Cross it out. Burden, I forbid you to read French authors until the end of May."

Having issued this Draconian edict, this tyrant, over whose head three and seventy winters had already passed, left her gentlewoman impaled haplessly upon the two-spiked thorn of shame and confusion. She proceeded to indulge in her daily siesta, which advancing years rendered more than ever

necessary if her store of natural energy was to remain equal to the demands which were made upon it.

At four o'clock, as I think I have told you already, it was the old lady's custom, if the weather was favorable, to take the air in her yellow chariot. Upon this momentous day, however, the elements were adverse; and at twenty-seven minutes past four, by the clock in the blue drawing-room, she was to be found in that spacious, somber, yet magnificent apartment. She was wearing her second-best turban, a black silk dress, and a collar of priceless old lace, secured by a brooch which was said to have been given to an ancestress by good Queen Elizabeth, who, for reasons of state, afterwards cut off the head of the recipient. Enthroned before a silver teapot and twelve Crown Derby teacups, with a monogram upon the bottom, prepared to offer some very weak tea and some stale bread and butter to a number of persons who were not in the least likely to appear to claim it, she presented as formidable a figure as any to be found in London.

I lay stress upon the time—twenty-seven minutes past four—for that is the hour at which this history really begins. Then it was that a four-wheeled vehicle of a rapidly disappearing type drew up before the imposing front door of the house in Hill Street. Upon the roof of the "growler" was a dilapidated wooden box, insecurely tied with a cord which had been pieced in three places. And seated modestly enough in its interior was—well, the First Cause of All Romance.

I cannot say more than that. There she was. The first thing appertaining to her that was projected from the dim recesses of the "growler" was her straw hat. Now, as I think I have already observed, there is a great deal in a hat. They are full of character—straw hats especially. And as it is the duty of a historian to extenuate nothing, it has to be said that this was a preposterous hat altogether. In the first place, its dimensions were certainly remarkable; it flopped absurdly; there was a sag of the brims which was irresistibly impossible; while as for the general condition and contour of the hat, the less said upon that subject the better.

In general shape, design, and texture, this primitive article was more like an inverted vegetable basket than anything else. Unmistakably rustic, even in its prime, it was now old, discolored, and misshapen; and the piece of black ribbon that had adorned it in its youth was really not fit for the West End of London. Purchased of the general outfitter of Slocum Magna for the sum of one and elevenpence halfpenny in the spring of 1900, I am not concerned to deny that it was as rudimentary a form of headgear as was ever devised by the very remote district to which it owed its being. It had absolutely no business at all in that chaste thoroughfare which for many years past has been dedicated to the usage of fashion.

I am taking up a lot of time over the hat, although I am aware that my readers are saying, "Bother the hat! Tell us what is underneath it." Precisely.

All in good time. But it is my duty to set down things in the exact order they emerged from the dim recesses of the " growler." The inverted vegetable basket was the first to emerge undoubtedly. And then came the tip of a chin. It was inclined at a furtive angle of feminine curiosity. Although only the extreme tip of it was visible, the preposterous headgear which overshadowed it really ought not to be mentioned on the same page with it. For there can be no question that the chin was the work of a very great Artist indeed.

The cabman came down from his perch. He was a veteran, with an extremely red visage, and a general look of knowledge which he had a perfect right to assume.

" You are 'ere, miss," said he, as he opened the door of the " growler " with a spacious air which almost suggested that he was the ground landlord of the whole of the West End of London. " You would like the portmanter down, wouldn't you? "

" Yes, please," drawled a friendly voice from within.

While the cabman, with great ceremony and an immense display of exertion, was lifting the corded box from the roof, the owner of the inverted vegetable basket emerged from the " growler," marched up the steps of the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne's town residence, and rang a loud peal upon the front-door bell.

The front door was opened immediately by no less

a person than John, who was rather inclined to expect a duchess. John devoted the greater, the more serious portion of his life to the expectation of duchesses. And with his imperturbable mien, his somewhat supercilious eyes, and his superb suit of livery, which did infinite credit to the most exclusive firm in Savile Row, no man on this planet, whatever point they have reached in Mars, was better fitted to receive one.

John was taken aback. By an inexcusable oversight on the part of the powers that obtained in Hill Street, the personal retainers of the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne had not been informed that her ladyship expected her niece. No carriage had been sent to meet her. The fact was that the old lady expected her on the following day. Whether the Reverend Aloysius Perry had expressed himself obscurely, or whether Lady Crewkerne and her gentlewoman had read his letter carelessly, is a problem not easy to solve. But there the matter stood. The fair visitor from Slocum Magna in the middle of Dartmoor, North Devon, was not in the least expected, and John was taken aback.

It did not take him long to recover, however, for his natural self-possession was considerable, and he was a man of the world. Almost immediately he began to subject the invader to a very severe scrutiny. He began with the crown of her hat. To say the least, the beginning was very unfortunate. From the hat his hostile gaze passed to a very rustic-looking cloak which had a hood to it. If there was one thing

that John despised more than another, it was a cloak with a hood.

Then the frock underneath! It was a sort of lilac print arrangement, faded in places, and completely outgrown by its wearer, who—whisper it not in Bond Street!—stood exactly six feet in her stockings. As the intelligent reader will doubtless surmise, the skirt of this nondescript garment displayed a great deal more ankle than is considered correct in the metropolis. And such ankles! Yet the boots which adorned them may have made them appear worse than they really were. The village cobbler at Slocum Magna has always been allowed to be a conscientious and painstaking craftsman, but it is very doubtful whether he will ever be awarded a diploma for his skill in the higher graces of his calling. The ankles of the fair visitor were encased in the stoutest, most misshapen pair of laced-up boots John had ever seen in his life.

Further, John's eye fell upon a pair of gloves which in his opinion were all that a pair of gloves should not be. They were made of black cotton and were very freely darned; and, as if this were not enough, the right glove was clasped round the handle of a wicker basket of a dreadfully rural, not to say common, character. The lid, which was secured by a piece of string, had a great air of uncertainty about it. At any moment it threatened to give way to the weight it had to bear. And as if all these unlucky details did not themselves suffice, there was a "growler" immediately opposite the sacred precincts; while

at that very moment a red-faced and festive-looking cabman was toiling up the steps with a dilapidated wooden box, tied by a cord which had been pieced in three places.

In the circumstances there was only one thing for John to do. This John did with great energy and conviction. He sniffed.

At almost the same moment a perfectly ludicrous drawl assailed his ears.

" Does Aunt Caroline live here, please? " said the occupant of the doorstep.

It is not too much to say that John was nonplused by the question.

" This is the residence of the Countess of Crewkerne," said he with hauteur.

Unhappily, the effect of this announcement was marred by the officious behavior of the cabman. That worthy was oppressed by no sense of embarrassment. [illegible] wheeze and a grunt which were wholly un- [illegible] because the box contained so little, he made his way past its owner with ostentatious heaviness, and was about to bring it into forcible contact with John's best suit of livery, when the custodian of the portals realized that it was a time for action.

" Don't bring it in," said he, sternly. " Stay where you are. I will make inquiries."

With a glance, not to the cabman only, but to the wearer of the inverted vegetable basket also, which intimated that they crossed that threshold upon peril of their lives, John turned upon his heel. He walked across the entrance-hall to confer with his chief, who

of course was no less a personage than Mr. Marchbanks himself.

The conference was grave, but it was brief. Mr. Marchbanks came forward in his own inimitable manner, only to find that the fair intruder, preposterous hat, hooded cloak, cobbled boots, darned gloves and all, had had the temerity to enter.

I do not say positively that Mr. Marchbanks frowned upon her; but certainly he looked very majestic; and it is my deliberate judgment that had you searched the length and breadth of Mayfair it would have been impossible to find a more imposing man than he. His nose was like the Duke of Wellington's, and it was known that his demeanor was modeled upon that of that renowned hero and patriot. In his cutaway morning-coat and spotless shirt-front, and his great Gladstone collar, purchased at the same shop as was affected by that distinguished statesman, with his black-bow tie and his patrician features, he might just as well have been prime minister of these realms as merely the butler to old Lady Crewkerne.

I lay particular stress upon these facts, and I want all my feminine readers to make an especial effort to comprehend them, because the behavior of the Heroine was such as has never previously been offered to the public in a work of this character.

She attempted to shake hands with the butler.

In a measure John was to blame. He approached Mr. Marchbanks so reverently, he addressed him with such an air of deference, that the artless intruder

might almost be pardoned for jumping to the conclusion that Mr. Marchbanks was a marquis uncle whom she had never heard of before. At any rate, no sooner had the finely chiseled profile of Mr. Marchbanks confronted her than the creature of the straw hat tucked the wicker basket under her left arm, and thrust out her right hand with a spasmodic suddenness which dumfounded Mr. Marchbanks completely.

"Oh, how do you do?" she said. "I hope you are quite well."

Mr. Marchbanks did exactly what you would expect him to do. He drew himself up to his full height. Yet there was no confusion in his gesture, although it was a great crisis in his life. After an instant of silence in which he sought very successfully to recover the grand manner, he held a short private colloquy with his subaltern. Neither of these gentlemen had been informed that her ladyship expected her niece, but Mrs. Plunket the housekeeper had informed them that a new under-housemaid was expected at six o'clock.

That is how the instinct of Mr. Marchbanks came to betray him.

CHAPTER V

THE INSTINCT OF MR. MARCHBANKS BETRAYS HIM

IT is impossible to forgive Mr. Marchbanks. He of all men ought to have known that the fair intruder was what is technically known as "a lady." In these democratic times it is true this mysterious entity is of many kinds, and it was a point of honor with Mr. Marchbanks to keep as far behind them as he decently could. But it is impossible to forgive him for jumping to his absurd conclusion. One can understand a comparative amateur such as John, who judged things objectively, making such an inexcusable blunder; but that such a past master in the fine shades of social status should have confirmed him in it, is one of those things that frankly defeats us.

In the stateliest fashion, with his silvered head held very erectly, Mr. Marchbanks made his way to the housekeeper's room.

Mrs. Plunket, indisputable sovereign of the nether regions, was taking tea. Mr. Marchbanks greeted her with an air of private wrong.

"A young person, ma'am, is arrived," said he.

"The new under-housemaid is not due until six o'clock," said Mrs. Plunket. "She has no right to come before her time."

"I am almost afraid, ma'am," said Mr. Marchbanks, with diplomatic reserve, "that this is her first place."

"Surely not," said Mrs. Plunket. "She has been ten months in the service of the Duchess Dowager of Blankhampton."

"Then, I fear," said Mr. Marchbanks, gravely, "that she has not profited by her experience."

"Indeed, Mr. Marchbanks!" said Mrs. Plunket.

"She rang the front-door bell," said Mr. Marchbanks.

"That is unpardonable," said Mrs. Plunket. "Yet the Duchess Dowager of Blankhampton is generally considered very good service."

"Things are very unsettled, ma'am, in these days," said Mr. Marchbanks, gloomily. "It seems sometimes that even good service is a thing of the past. If we must have Radical Governments and we must have higher education of the masses, there is no saying where we shall get to. She—ah, she attempted to shake hands with me!"

Mr. Marchbanks' solemn, deep-toned note of pathos impinged upon the domain of poetry.

Mrs. Plunket shuddered.

"Mr. Marchbanks," said she, "if you desire it she shall be dismissed."

At heart, however, Mr. Marchbanks was a man of liberal views, as became one who had been nurtured in Whig traditions.

"She is young, ma'am," said he, with a dignified mildness which in the circumstances Mrs. Plunket

admired extremely. "A word in season from the right quarter might bear fruit."

"She shall have it," said Mrs. Plunket, with a truculent shake of the teapot.

"Her style of dress also leaves much to be desired," said Mr. Marchbanks. "It is distinctly *suburban* to my mind. But no doubt, ma'am, you will prefer to judge for yourself."

"I will see her," said Mrs. Plunket. "But I feel sure I shall have to dismiss her at once. Yet to be an under-housemaid short does make life so difficult."

"Perhaps, ma'am, she may be molded," said Mr. Marchbanks with the optimism of the true Whig.

Mr. Marchbanks withdrew, climbed the stairs at a dignified leisure, and reached the marble floor of the spacious entrance-hall. He was greeted immediately by a gesture of distress from John. It seemed that the chaste air of Hill Street was being defiled by an altercation between a person in a battered straw hat and a rustical frock and an elderly cabman who smelt strongly of gin.

The fare had set down her wicker basket, and with some little difficulty had contrived to draw half a crown from the inside of her glove.

The cabman had received this coin dubiously. After gazing at it thoughtfully as it lay in his grimy palm, said he—

"What about the box, miss? And a wet arternoon."

"Papa said the fare would be half a crown from

Waterloo Station," said the wearer of the preposterous straw hat.

"I don't know about your pa, miss," said the cabman, "but I do know that the box is outside luggage. And I lifted it down meself, and I carried it in with my own 'ands, and it's raining like old boots."

"Papa said——" the Straw-hatted One was explaining slowly and with patience, when Mr. Marchbanks, in response to John's appeal, interrupted her with quiet authority.

Very deftly Mr. Marchbanks added sixpence to the cabman's half-crown.

"Go away as soon as possible," said Mr. Marchbanks. "We are likely to have callers at any moment."

The cabman touched his hat in recognition of the fact that he had to do with a gentleman, and proceeded to carry out these instructions.

"Do you mind coming this way, miss—ah," said Mr. Marchbanks a little haughtily to the lady of the hat.

"Miss Perry," said she, with a drawl that was almost ludicrous.

In extenuation of the conduct of Mr. Marchbanks it must be said that neither his sense of sight nor of hearing were quite so good as they had been. Otherwise that ludicrous drawl must have caused him considerable uneasiness.

Miss Perry tucked the wicker basket under her arm, and followed Mr. Marchbanks with perfect friendliness and simplicity. Mr. Marchbanks opened

the door of the housekeeper's room, and in his own inimitable manner, announced—

"Miss Perry."

A decidedly stern, angular-looking lady disengaged her chin from a teacup.

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Plunket," Mr. Marchbanks deigned to explain to the owner of the straw hat.

Mr. Marchbanks mentioned the name of Mrs. Plunket, the housekeeper, in a manner to suggest that it expected reverence from Miss Perry. Again, however, he was doomed to disappointment. The stately and distant inclination of Mrs. Plunket's head merely provoked a frank and friendly impulse in Miss Perry.

"Oh, how do you do?" said she. "I hope you are quite well."

To the dismay of Mr. Marchbanks and to the dignified stupefaction of Mrs. Plunket, the owner of the straw hat made a most determined effort to shake hands with that lady.

Mrs. Plunket gave her a finger. Being as short-sighted as Mr. Marchbanks himself, she hastily adjusted her spectacles to take a more adequate survey of this extremely temerarious person.

Now, the first thing that impressed Mrs. Plunket was not the straw hat, not the gloves, not the frock, not the wicker basket, and not even the cloak with the hood. It was the truly Amazonian proportions of Miss Perry that first impressed her.

She was exactly six feet high in her stockings, no more and no less. And everything about her, from

the too-visible ankles upwards, were in the same proportion. Had Mrs. Plunket had an eye for such details, and unfortunately she had not, she would have observed in addition to the disconcerting physique and the shabby and ill-fitting clothes, a pair of the bluest eyes and a mane of the yellowest hair that ever came out of Devon. It is true that the eyes were somewhat dim and heavy, because they had shed a vast quantity of tears during the past forty-eight hours. All the same their quality was wonderful. Then also there was an equally wonderful West Country complexion, washed by the dew, fed by the sunshine, and refined by the winds of the sea and the moorland into a perfect glamor of pink and white. Yet all these enchanting details had nothing to say to Mrs. Plunket. For the first time in her long and successful career she had engaged a new under-housemaid merely upon the strength of "high-class references" only, with the fatal neglect of the precaution of "a personal interview." In consequence the new under-housemaid proved to be six feet high, whose *naïveté* of dress and manners was something wholly beyond Mrs. Plunket's experience.

"Pray sit down," said Mrs. Plunket, with an arctic air which would not have disgraced the presiding genius of the blue drawing-room.

Miss Perry sat down with spacious ease. She placed the wicker basket on her knees and rested her elbows upon it.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" said Mrs. Plunket, stiffly.

"Oh yes, please," said Miss Perry, who seemed sincerely gratified by the suggestion.

Mr. Marchbanks retired discreetly, while Mrs. Plunket prepared a cup of tea for Miss Perry. As she handed it to her she gazed very sternly through her spectacles at the new under-housemaid who sat nursing her wicker basket with remarkable unconcern.

"Thank you so much," said Miss Perry, accepting the cup of tea with really charming friendliness.

"I had no idea that you were so large," said Mrs. Plunket, with an aggrieved air. "I think the fact ought to have been mentioned."

Miss Perry drew off her darned cotton gloves with great simplicity.

"I *am* rather big," said she, "but if the beds are too small I can curl myself up."

"I was not thinking of the beds," said Mrs. Plunket, severely. "There are all sizes here. I am thinking of her ladyship. She is very strict and somewhat old-fashioned in her ideas. I am afraid she may object to your appearance."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Perry, putting three lumps of sugar in her tea with the greatest amiability.

"Yes," said Mrs. Plunket, sternly, "I do. It is most unusual. Had you been an under-footman of course it would not have mattered."

"Don't you think so?" said Miss Perry, who seemed to be more interested in her cup of tea than in the subject of the under-footman.

Now, Miss Perry had not a great brain. Indeed,

in the opinion of those best qualified to speak upon the subject, she had not a brain at all. She was merely an amiable, frank, friendly person, constitutionally slow-witted and phlegmatic. The manner of her reception in the household of her august relation, whom she had never seen, and of whom the only thing she knew positively was that, in conjunction with the rest of that great family, she had treated her papa and her dead mamma abominably, ought to have given her furiously to think. No one, however, could have been less addicted to that process than Miss Perry.

There certainly came into her mind in a confused sort of manner a remarkable speech that had been made by her dearest papa when he opened the superb coroneted envelope and read Aunt Caroline's letter. "I dare say her ladyship has a vacancy for an under-housemaid!" he had said, with his quaint and whimsical laugh, which had yet been so severely tried by the things of this world as to be not quite so mirthful as it might have been.

By the time Miss Perry had come to remember this circumstance a deep wave of color had crept over her wonderful countenance. But hers was the temperament of a philosopher. Instead of suffering an agony of horrified embarrassment, as some young ladies might have done, she merely regarded her tea and hoped to receive an invitation to partake of bread and butter.

"You have been in service before, have you not?" said Mrs. Plunket.

"Oh, no," drawled Miss Perry, finishing her

cup of tea and looking as though she would like another.

"I am afraid this is serious," said Mrs. Plunket, with chilling dignity. "I have been misinformed."

A pause ensued, in which Miss Perry hoped in vain for a little more refreshment.

"It is an awfully nice day, isn't it?" said Miss Perry, conversationally.

Mrs. Plunket was too much preoccupied with the external aspect of the latest thing in housemaids to pay the least attention to the weather.

"A mistake appears to have been made," said that lady, acidly. "I am informed that your name is Perry."

Miss Perry confirmed that information with modest yet charming friendliness.

"What is your first name?" said Mrs. Plunket.

Miss Perry slowly opened her blue eyes to a width that was really extraordinary, and gave a wise little shake to her mane, which was the color of daffodils.

"My name is Araminta," said she, with a drawl that was perfectly ludicrous, "but they call me Goose because I am rather a Sil-lay."

Mrs. Plunket sat bolt upright. Her countenance was the picture of horror. The latest thing in housemaids was too much for her. She flung up her gaunt arms with a tragic gesture.

"Emma Maddison is the name of the person I am expecting," said Mrs. Plunket.

"R-r-really," said Miss Perry, who rolled her R's in an inimitable fashion.

"A serious mistake has been made by somebody," said Mrs. Plunket. "I am expecting a person of the name of Emma Maddison, who has been under-housemaid for ten months in the service of the Duchess Dowager of Blankhampton."

"R-r-really," said Miss Perry, whose azure orbs were fixed upon the teapot.

Mrs. Plunket renewed her scrutiny of this extraordinary housemaid. The battered straw hat or inverted vegetable basket, which sagged at the brim in an almost immoral manner, the hooded cloak, the wicker basket with string attachment, and the unprecedented display of ankle, came again within her purview.

"This will never do," she remarked in much the same fashion that the Right Honorable Lord Jeffrey reviewed Mr. Wordsworth's poetry.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Plunket, austerely. "Where have you come from?"

"My home is at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, dissembling her pride in that fact in an uncommonly well-bred manner.

"Where, pray, is Slocum Magna?"

"Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, who was already marveling in her slow-witted way at the consummate ignorance of London people, "is the next parish to Widdiford."

"And where, pray, is Widdiford?" demanded Mrs. Plunket.

Miss Perry's wonderful blue eyes opened to their limit. Widdiford was the center of civilization. It

was the fixed standard by which the world itself was measured. Miss Perry slowly marshaled her battalions for a great intellectual display.

"I started from Widdiford," said she, "at a quarter past nine, and I got to London at four. That makes nearly seven hours by railway, and you have to change twice."

During the pause which followed this announcement Mrs. Plunket grew very thoughtful indeed. Finally a clear conviction seemed to enfold her.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I fear that an under-housemaid who is six feet high is out of the question. Her ladyship has a rooted objection to any kind of extravagance."

Now, as I have said, Miss Perry was not in the least clever. The sum of her knowledge of the world had been acquired at the uncommonly rustic parsonage at Slocum Magna. She realized in her lethargic fashion that her Aunt Caroline was a very proud and unfeeling old woman, who had an odious way of treating her poor relations. Therefore, coming vaguely to discern that the situation in which she found herself must be very remarkable, a look of dismay begin to settle upon her pink and white countenance. Mrs. Plunket, observing it, was not disposed to be unkind.

"You had better stay here to-night," said she; "and in the morning your fare will be paid back to Slocum Magna."

At the mention of the blessed name of Slocum Magna the look of dismay lifted from the face of

Miss Perry. But it was for a moment only. She remembered with a pang of sore distress that she had come all the way to London on a great mission. The ebbing fortunes of the Parsonage were vested in her. When her dearest papa, whose trousers seemed to get shorter and shabbier every year, had watched her button a whole sovereign and two half-crowns and a third-class railway ticket into her glove on the down platform at Widdiford Junction, and he had kissed her on both cheeks, he said, "If it were not for Dickie and Charley and Polly and Milly and Betty, we'd take precious good care that your Aunt Caroline did not rob us of the pick of the basket." Therefore, very slowly yet very clearly, her duty seemed to shape itself in her mind.

"Oh, if you please," said she, "I don't think I want to go back to Slocum Magna. Perhaps I might speak to Aunt Caroline."

"Aunt Caroline?" said Mrs. Plunket, with a puzzled air.

She then remembered that although Mrs. Bateman, the cook, was called Hannah, as cooks always are, her real name was Caroline.

"I was not aware," said Mrs. Plunket, "that you were a niece of Mrs. Bateman's."

Miss Perry was not aware of it either. A ray of intelligence percolated to that unsusceptible mind. All was explained. She had come to the wrong house.

"Is this Mrs. Bateman's?" said she.

"Certainly it is not Mrs. Bateman's," said Mrs.

Plunket, sternly, " but she lives here, of course. Perhaps you would like to see her."

So much was Miss Perry mystified by this new turn of events that she was unable to say whether she would like to see Mrs. Bateman or not. In Mrs. Plunket's opinion silence gave consent. She rang the bell and desired the immediate attendance of that lady.

A portly, good-humored dame of florid complexion and communicative manners made her appearance.

" Mrs. Bateman," said Mrs. Plunket, briefly, " I believe this is your niece."

Having overcome her first emotion of legitimate surprise, Mrs. Bateman welcomed Miss Perry with effusion.

" Why," she exclaimed, " it is that girl of Maria's! She is the image of Maria. Very pleased to see you, my love. How's your father? "

The next thing of which Miss Perry was conscious was that a pair of fat arms were hugging her and that she was being kissed in a very vigorous manner.

" How like your mother to be sure," said Mrs. Bateman, " and what a big girl you've grown! "

" Too big, in my opinion, for good service," said Mrs. Plunket.

" You can't have too much of a good thing, can you, my love? " said Mrs. Bateman.

Miss Perry was bewildered. Mrs. Bateman was not in the least like the Aunt Caroline she had expected to see.

"Are you r-r-really Aunt Caroline?" she said, with her eyes at their widest.

"You must be Sally," said Mrs. Bateman, "little Sally Dickinson who used to be so fond of sugar."

"It appears to have been a stimulating diet," said Mrs. Plunket.

"Little Sally Dickinson who didn't like to go to bed early," said Mrs. Bateman. "Law, how you've grown, my dear!"

"My name is Araminta Perry," said that wonderful person with slow-drawn solemnity.

"Sally Dickinson, my love," said Mrs. Bateman. "I should know you anywhere."

It was now the turn of Mrs. Plunket to grow bewildered.

"There is some mystery here," said she. "If she is Araminta Perry she cannot be Sally Dickinson, and if she is Sally Dickinson she cannot be Araminta Perry."

All concerned seemed to feel that this was pregnant reasoning.

"That is right, Mrs. Plunket," said Mrs. Bateman, "that is common sense and human nature."

"Are you r-r-really Aunt Caroline?" said Miss Perry, with her blue eyes growing rounder and rounder.

"Of course I am, my love," said Mrs. Bateman, affectionately; "and very proud to be the aunt of such a bouncing girl as you."

It was left to the practical intelligence of Mrs. Plunket to find the solution to the puzzle.

"I presume," said she to Miss Perry with great severity, "that Bateman *is* the name of your Aunt Caroline."

"Oh, no," said that Featherbrain.

"No!" gasped Mrs. Bateman.

"No!" said Mrs. Plunket, with great sternness. "Then what, pray, is the name of your Aunt Caroline?"

The fair Araminta knitted her brows. Was there ever anything so unlucky? The name of her august relation had passed clean out of her head.

"I don't remember," drawled Miss Featherbrain, in the throes of a considerable mental struggle.

"You don't remember!" said Mrs. Plunket. "Upon my word!"

Mrs. Plunket and Mrs. Bateman subjected Miss Perry to a prolonged scrutiny.

"There," said Mrs. Bateman, triumphantly, "it is just as I said. She is Sally Dickinson."

"Try to remember the first letter of your aunt's name," said Mrs. Plunket, in a tone which frightened Mrs. Bateman, but which seemed to make no particular impact upon Miss Perry.

That Featherbrain mustered all her battalions to wage herculean warfare. She knitted her brows and clasped her wicker basket still more firmly. In the process of time, as was only to be expected after such a stupendous display of mental energy, an inspiration came to her.

"She's the Countess of Something!"

Mrs. Plunket sat bolt upright, as if moved by an invisible spring.

"The Countess of Something!" said she.

Upon one side of her face was incredulity, upon the other was dismay. She then looked at Mrs. Bateman blankly.

"The Countess of Crewkerne," said Miss Featherbrain, with an air of triumph.

Mrs. Bateman gave a little howl.

"Oh lord!" she cried, "haven't I just put my foot in it? It means a month's notice."

Mrs. Bateman simply turned and bolted. Mrs. Plunket, as became her exalted position, was of stouter fiber.

"Miss Perry," said she, with a dignity that was really admirable, "I apologize for a most unfortunate mistake. I regret it exceedingly. I hope you will be so kind as not to mention the matter to her ladyship."

"Not at all," said Miss Perry, with charming amiability.

Mr. Marchbanks was promptly summoned.

"A most unfortunate mistake has been made, Mr. Marchbanks," said Mrs. Plunket to that ambassador. "Miss Perry is her ladyship's niece."

To say that a feather would have knocked Mr. Marchbanks over is to state the case lightly. Yet even in the depths of his consternation he directed a glance of solemn unbelief at the preposterous hat.

"Announce Miss Perry's arrival to her ladyship,"

said Mrs. Plunket, "but do not mention anything else."

Mr. Marchbanks was besieged with doubt as he made his way to the blue drawing-room. In spite of Mrs. Plunket's sensational statement, incredulity still reigned in his mind. It was possible that a hideous error had been committed; and yet in the ripeness of his judgment he clearly foresaw the possibility of committing another. He had Mrs. Plunket's authority that the nondescript creature who had come with a corded box in a four-wheel cab, who wore an unseemly hat, unmentionable gloves and boots, and who had attempted to shake hands with him, was her ladyship's niece; but all the same he had his own opinion.

Mr. Marchbanks entered the blue drawing-room on the horns of a dilemma. It was difficult to know what line to take.

He was glad to observe that her ladyship was alone with her gentlewoman. They were engaged in a game of piquet; and the gentlewoman was just about to be rubiconed, an indignity she suffered on an average three times a day.

Mr. Marchbanks approached his mistress, and having waited while she claimed two for the last trick, said—

"A young person of the name of Perry is arrived, my lady."

Her ladyship looked at Mr. Marchbanks bleakly.

"What is that to do with me?" she said.

It would seem that for the moment the name of Perry had passed as completely out of her head as

though it had never been in it; and the question she had put to Mr. Marchbanks was precisely the one that that diplomatist desired her to answer herself.

"She appears to have business with your ladyship," said he.

"Very odd," said his venerable mistress. "A young person of the name of Perry."

And then quite suddenly a light dawned upon her.

"Of course," she said to her gentlewoman; "I had forgotten. That girl of Polly's."

Like a hawk she swooped down upon the luckless Mr. Marchbanks.

"Tell me, Marchbanks," she said, "what you mean precisely by a young person of the name of Perry. Do you wish to infer that she is not a lady?"

It was as tight a corner as Mr. Marchbanks had ever been in. Yet he yielded to none in professional wisdom.

"I don't wish to infer, your ladyship, that she might not be a lady," said Mr. Marchbanks, cautiously.

"It appears to me, Marchbanks," said his venerable mistress, "that you are getting too old for your place. I will see my niece, Miss Perry."

"Thank you, my lady," said Mr. Marchbanks, with a bead of perspiration upon his forehead.

CHAPTER VI

UNWARRANTABLE BEHAVIOR OF TOBIAS

THE old lady sat very upright to receive her niece.

It is regrettable to have to state that a subtle air of triumph was hovering around Mr. Marchbanks as he announced Miss Perry. For that irresponsible person still retained her hooded cloak, the preposterous hat was there in all its *naïveté*, her frock looked more shrunken and her cobbled boots more conspicuous than ever; and in her left hand the wicker basket tied with string was very firmly borne.

The old lady mounted her eyeglass as a preliminary measure. She gazed at her *protégée* with a resolution that was almost awful. But it took more than this to defeat Miss Perry.

"Oh, how do you do?" said that irresponsible person, coming forward and completely enveloping the old lady and her gentlewoman in a most gracious beam. "I hope you are quite well."

The presiding genius of the blue drawing-room looked Miss Perry up and looked Miss Perry down, from the crown of the luckless hat to the soles of the cobbled boots. At a disdainful leisure the Amazonian proportions, which the general inadequacy of the out-

grown garments seemed to accentuate, sank into the ruthless critic. The grim old mouth relaxed in frank astonishment.

"Dear me!" it said, "how uncomfortable."

Miss Perry was not really abashed, although the turban, the eyeglass, the ebony cane, the hawk-like features, and the general day-of-judgment demeanor certainly gave pause to that Featherbrain. At least, she opened her blue eyes very wide and gripped her wicker basket very firmly.

The old lady's truculent gaze fell upon that unfortunate accompaniment.

"What, pray, is that contrivance?" she demanded.

Miss Perry tucked the wicker basket under her arm.

"Oh, if you please, Aunt Caroline," said she, with a drawl that was really irresistibly foolish, "this is Tobias."

"Tobias," said the old lady, suspiciously. "Who pray, and what, pray, is Tobias?"

Perhaps it is right to mention that the old lady was not alone in her suspiciousness. It was shared by Ponto. That overfed quadruped, having made a very good luncheon indeed, was curled up at the feet of his mistress. Yet at the mere mention of Tobias, whether by an association of ideas, or by a process of mental telepathy peculiar to the dumb creation, I am not prepared to say, but Ponto began to grow decidedly restless.

"I trust," said the old lady, viewing the wicker

basket with an increasing disfavor, "that Tobias is not any kind of an animal."

As if to corroborate his mistress, Ponto opened his eyes and began to grow uncommonly wide awake.

"Tobias is just a sweet," said Miss Perry, with a charming air of reassurance. "He is just an old precious."

The old lady looked so positively arctic as she addressed the custodian of Tobias that both Miss Burden and Mr. Marchbanks were chilled to the marrow.

"If Tobias is a living thing," said the old lady, "and I have every reason to believe that it is, I forbid it the blue drawing-room. And I consider it an act of gross impertinence——"

However, before the old lady could conclude a speech which was intended to exterminate both Tobias and his custodian, there befell a most melancholy occurrence. Whether Tobias, growing incensed at his excommunication, became violent in his basket, or whether his custodian was so much distressed thereby as to relax her hold upon it, will never be known with any degree of certainty. But what happened was this. Right in the middle of the old lady's ruthless deliverance upon the subject the wicker basket fell with a thud onto the Persian carpet.

At the same instant the lid fell off in the most dramatic manner. Two yellow shin pads, which had seen service in the hockey field, and a long, lean brown body flew out together. Miss Burden screamed; and incredible as it may appear, Ponto shot straight

up the window curtains, and feeling dear life to be at stake balanced himself very precariously upon the pole at the top.

Miss Burden approached the verge of hysteria. Mr. Marchbanks seemed overwhelmed. As for the custodian of Tobias, she picked up the yellow shin pads with spacious and charming unconcern, quite as if nothing had happened. The old lady's nerves were undoubtedly shaken; all the same she retained the perfect command of a lively and vigorous self-possession.

She gathered her black silk dress about her, and poised her ebony walking-stick determinedly, and then she stormed.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Is it a snake?"

Miss Burden screamed.

Miss Perry replaced the yellow shin pads in the wicker basket with a leisureliness which was highly reassuring.

"Speak, girl," stormed the old lady. "I repeat, what is it? If you have dared to introduce a reptile into my drawing-room you shall both leave this house immediately."

Even this decree did not perturb Miss Perry. She still preserved her constitutional obliviousness to anything in the nature of commotion.

"Oh no, dear Aunt Caroline," she drawled. "Tobias is not a snake. He is only a ferret."

The old lady snorted blood and fire.

"A ferret!" she stormed. "I positively forbid ferrets in my drawing-room. Marchbanks, remove

it immediately, and then have the goodness to fetch down Ponto from the curtain-pole."

Now, although Mr. Marchbanks was a strong, silent man he did not quite know how to grapple with the situation. To begin with, although his experience of men and things was very wide, it has to be confessed that he had never handled a ferret in his life. And, again, it was not easy to know where Tobias had got to.

"Remove it immediately," stormed the old lady.

Mr. Marchbanks stooped very cautiously to peer under the table. To his infinite relief Tobias was not there.

However, the hawklike eyes of his mistress very quickly detected the whereabouts of the alien presence.

"It is behind the window curtains."

Mr. Marchbanks approached the window curtains very warily. But even then he was unable to see Tobias.

"There it is," said his mistress. "In the corner there. Approach quietly. And if you value your fingers be careful where you put them."

Mr. Marchbanks appeared to value his fingers so much that nothing seemed farther from his intention than to bring them into the vicinity of Tobias.

"Why don't you do as you are told, man? There it is in the corner, straight in front of your nose."

Mr. Marchbanks, however, still seemed wholly unable to locate Tobias.

It was left to Miss Perry to play the part of the

goddess out of the machine. That Scatterbrain, having at last clearly realized the situation, came forward to the window curtains, open basket in hand, in the friendliest and most reassuring manner.

"He is just a sweet," she said to Mr. Marchbanks. "He never bites a soul if you take him round the throat gently. There he is, the duckums!"

Mr. Marchbanks appeared still unable to see Tobias.

"Do you think," said Miss Perry, "I had better take him myself?"

"Yes, girl," stormed the old lady, "I think you had better."

Mr. Marchbanks, who seemed to share the opinion of his mistress, stepped back haughtily several paces.

"Come along, then," said Miss Perry, cooing to the window curtains. "Come along, Toby, then." She knelt down and began to grope. "Come along, Toby, boy. There he is, the sweet!"

Very deftly she made a grab at the lurking, lean, brown form of Tobias, took him by the throat, popped him into the open basket, and fastened down the lid.

"He wouldn't bite a soul," she said, rising to her full height, with a smile of invincible friendliness. "He is just a precious."

"Carry it into the hall!" cried the old lady. "Marchbanks, fetch down Ponto."

Poised very insecurely upon a chair, Mr. Marchbanks found it not altogether easy to induce Ponto to quit his place of refuge. At length, however, he was

able to restore the quivering quadruped to his mistress.

In the meantime Miss Perry, with affectionate pride, had carried the wicker basket into the hall.

" Burden," said the old lady, truculently, " that girl ought to be flogged."

Upon the return of Miss Perry, with uplifted finger, the old lady ordered her to approach.

" Come here, girl," said she. " I think your behavior is disgraceful. Were you brought up in a barn? "

Such a direct and ruthless mode of address caused a blush to overspread the extremely picturesque countenance of Miss Perry. Quite suddenly her great blue eyes swam with tears.

" Tobias did not mean any harm," said she. " He *is* such a sweet. It was not his fault that I dropped the basket."

" Let us have no more of Tobias," said the old lady. " Now understand "—the finger went up again —" upon no pretext whatever will I allow in future a ferret to enter my drawing-room. I really—I—upon my word——! "

The old lady subsided in an incoherent gurgle of indignation.

Meanwhile, the sight of tears, as was always the case, had moved the tender heart of Miss Burden.

" Dear Lady Crewkerne," said she, " Miss Perry has had a long journey. I feel sure she must be tired. Would she not like a little refreshment? "

The mention of the word refreshment seemed un-

mistakably to touch a responsive chord in the susceptible mechanism of Miss Perry.

" Bring some tea," said the old lady to Mr. Marchbanks very gruffly. And then to the culprit she said with tremendous austerity, " Would you like something to eat? "

" Oh yes, please," said Miss Perry. At the same moment she mopped up her tears with an absurdly small handkerchief with a blue-spotted border.

" What do you eat, as a rule? " said the old lady, with a sarcasm that was not in the least obvious to Miss Perry.

" I eat bread and jam, as a rule," said Miss Perry, with a promptitude that was delightfully persuasive.

" Humph," said the old lady. She measured Miss Perry with her grim old eyes as though she were a rare specimen in the Zoölogical Garden. " Bread and jam," said she. And then, with an air of really tremendous sarcasm, she said for the guidance of a discreet spectator, " Have the goodness, Marchbanks, to bring some bread and jam."

The old lady made a second survey of Miss Perry, from the crown of the luckless straw hat to the soles of the cobbled boots, while the object of it folded up neatly the handkerchief with the spotted border and returned it to a mysterious pocket. She then stood wondering what was going to happen in a singularly solemn manner.

" Sit down," said the old lady.

Miss Perry sat down spaciously upon a chair that was particularly fragile.

"The most uncomfortable creature I have ever seen," said the old lady in an aside to her gentlewoman. "Quite out of place in a drawing-room." And then to Miss Perry: "Have you ever been in a drawing-room before?"

"Oh yes," said Miss Perry.

"Where?" said the old lady.

"We have one at home," drawled Miss Perry, "but it is only a little one."

"Ah," said the old lady. "And where is your home, pray?"

"I live at the Parsonage at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry.

"Humph!" said the old lady. "Some kind of clerical bear-garden, I presume."

The providential reappearance of Mr. Marchbanks came to the aid of Miss Perry. He bore a massive silver tray with an equally massive silver teapot upon it. There was also an exquisite plate of old blue china. Upon this were five tiny pieces of bread and butter, each a little larger than Miss Perry's thumbnail, each arranged at an artistic angle, and each spread with a very thin layer of jam.

A beautiful table of rare Indian inlay work was set before Miss Perry. Mr. Marchbanks placed the silver tray upon it.

Miss Perry immediately sat very upright indeed.

"Thank you so much," said she. Her air was so charmingly sincere that it went some way towards reconciling Mr. Marchbanks to many things.

The old lady mounted her eyeglass again. It was

clear from the general irony of her demeanor that she was expecting some kind of development. In this expectation she was not disappointed.

For a moment Miss Perry appeared to be rather troubled by the waferlike texture of the bread and jam. It was only for a moment, however. Without waiting to pour out the tea into the tiny blue china cup that had been provided for its reception, she proceeded very carefully to pile each of the waferlike pieces of bread and jam one upon another. These by their united efforts having become a tolerable-sized morsel, Miss Perry opened her mouth with pensive deliberation, and placed therein gently but firmly the five pieces as one.

If there is a combination of words in the English language which can express the manner in which the old lady turned to meet the half-frightened gaze of her gentlewoman, it is certainly not in the possession of her biographer. Miss Perry, however, masticated her morsel with superb unconcern.

" Burden, have the goodness to ring the bell," said the old lady, with formidable politeness.

Mr. Marchbanks entered. As a preliminary measure his mistress fixed that diplomatist with her eye. She literally dared him to move a muscle.

" Marchbanks," said she, " have the goodness to bring another plate of bread and jam."

Mr. Marchbanks made a bow worthy of a reception at the Foreign Office.

" Thank you so much," said Miss Perry.

The old lady turned to Miss Perry, who appeared

to be stimulated by the morsel she had eaten, and even more so by the prospect of another.

"By the way," said the old lady, "where *is* Slocum Magna?"

Miss Perry's blue eyes, which by now were perfectly dry, opened to a width that was astonishing. The ignorance of London people was really very remarkable.

"Slocum Magna is the next village to Widdiford," said Miss Perry.

"Ah, yes, the next village to Widdiford. One ought to have known."

The manner in which Miss Perry strove to extenuate the painfully obvious ignorance of her august and formidable relation was really a triumph of good breeding.

"They haven't quite got the railway at Widdiford yet, don't you know," said Miss Perry, "but it is only three miles away, of course."

"The railway is only three miles away, of course," said the old lady, assenting with a grim chuckle.

The arrival of the second relay of bread and jam imposed silence upon Miss Perry. The faithfulness with which it was dealt with was quite equal to that previously displayed. It is no exaggeration to say that Miss Burden still looked a little frightened, while Ponto raised himself on his forepaws with a look of open admiration.

"By the way, what is your name?" said the old lady.

A somewhat lengthy pause was necessary to

enable Miss Perry to do justice to such a leading question.

"My name is Araminta," said she, and her drawl was carried to such a ludicrous length that even Ponto smiled at it, although he had very little sense of humor, "but they call me Goose because I am *rather* a Sil-lay."

The beak of the old lady seemed to take an additional curve. The hanging-judge look had never seemed so awe-inspiring.

"Your name is Araminta," she repeated with a deliberation that was positively sinister, "but they call you Goose because you are rather a silly. Do they indeed!"

Miss Perry beamed upon the old lady with a comprehensiveness that was perfectly distracting.

"I don't think I am really a silly," said she, as if she were quite convinced she were not, "but Muffin says I am. It's because I can never remember whether Tuesday comes after Monday or whether Monday comes after Tuesday."

"Who, pray, is Muffin?"

"Muffin is my sister, don't you know," said Miss Perry. "Her name is Elizabeth really, but we call her Muffin because she is *rather* a ragamuffin."

"Humph!" said the old lady.

By nature she was grave and grim, but it was Miss Burden's opinion that she had never looked quite so grave and quite so grim as in the course of this first interview with the late Lady Augusta's second daughter.

"Burden," said she in a truculent aside, "this comes of mixing the breed. Polly was a born fool, but she was never equal to this. What is to be done with the creature? It was my intention to marry her respectably so that she might be a help to her family, who are as poor as mice and who appear to live like pigs. But who, pray, will marry a natural?"

Miss Burden, however, was at heart incurably lenient in her judgments. She demurred with a vigor she seldom displayed.

"She is a singularly beautiful girl," said Miss Burden, with enthusiasm. "Her manner is delightfully her own, and she is formed like a goddess and she is perfectly charming."

"Faugh!" said the old lady, ruthlessly. "Burden, you are a born fool. The creature is an idiot. Look at her now."

Miss Perry had renounced her chair for political reasons. She was sitting now in the middle of the sofa. Her lips were slightly parted and one finger was unmistakably in her mouth. Her great blue eyes were gazing far away into vacancy. Also they appeared to be slightly moist. The fact was that at that moment Miss Perry was back at the Parsonage at Slocum Magna. Her sister Polly was pouring out tea for seven in really sensible cups, and Miss Perry herself was occupied in carving a piece of bread according to her personal fancy. At the Parsonage it was the very rational rule always to cut your own bread and spread your own jam; both of which, be-

ing made at home, were among the very few things of which you could have as much as you wanted.

It was doubtless an unfortunate moment for the higher criticism to observe Miss Perry.

" An extraordinary creature," said the old lady.

" I am reminded of some one," said Miss Burden, " yet I cannot think who it can be. It is somebody who is celebrated."

" That abandoned straw hat! " said the old lady. " It appears to have been originally used for carrying vegetables."

" She reminds me of some one," said Miss Burden, plaintively. " Who can it be, I wonder? "

And then the unexpected happened. Mr. Marchbanks announced: " The Earl of Cheriton."

CHAPTER VII

A THROWBACK

CHERITON entered, bearing a small parcel, with a certain ostentation.

"Caroline," said he, "as I was coming out of Truefitt's I remembered that for the first time in forty years I had forgotten to give you a present on your birthday. Last year I gave you a Bible. This year I have brought you this."

He cut the string of the parcel, and handed the present to Caroline Crewkerne.

With a grim, but not ungrateful, inclination of the second-best turban, the recipient began to relieve the present of its numerous trappings. A small but expensive hand-glass was exposed to view.

"Thank you, Cheriton. A very charming present."

"I hope it pleases you, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, with quite the *bel* air. "You have so long defied time that I felt a memento of his impotence might appeal to you."

"Thank you, Cheriton," said the redoubtable Caroline. "It is very kind to remember an old woman."

"A woman is as old as she looks," said Cheriton, "as Byron says."

"Byron?"

"I ascribe every truism to Byron. It confers a factitious importance, which at the same time is perfectly safe. Everybody pretends to have read Byron, yet nobody has."

"Burden has read him, I believe."

Miss Burden sighed romantically.

Lord Cheriton shook his finger at Miss Burden with arch solemnity.

"No boy under the age of twenty should be permitted to smoke cigarettes," said he. "And no woman under forty should be permitted to read Byron."

Caroline Crewkerne snorted.

"By the way," said Cheriton, "now I am here, I must pay homage to my duchess."

He took a half turn in the direction of the sofa. Miss Perry was still seated upon it in her pensive attitude. She was still gazing into vacancy, and she was somewhat in the shadow.

Immediately to the left of Miss Perry, intervening between her and Aunt Caroline, was the object that claimed for the moment the whole of Cheriton's attention. Rightly so, indeed, for it was nothing less than one of the world's masterpieces. It was a full-length portrait in a massive gilt frame: a truly regal canvas in the full meridian splendor of English art. Under the picture, in bold letters, was the magic legend, "Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough."

Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, was a young girl in

her teens, in an inordinately floppy hat of the period. Her countenance, ineffably simple, was a glamor of pink and white; her lips were slightly parted; the wonderful blue eyes were gazing into vacancy; and one finger was unmistakably in her mouth.

Cheriton, having fixed his glass with some elaboration, slowly backed a few paces, and yielded to the pose he always affected in the presence of this noble work.

In silence he stood to absorb the poetry, the innocence, the appeal of youth. He sighed profoundly.

"Caroline," he said, "I would give a whole row of Georgiana Devonshires for this. In my humble judgment it has never been equaled."

"Grandmamma Dorset wears well," said Caroline, with a grim chuckle.

"It ought to be called 'Simplicity'; it ought to be called 'Innocence.' Upon my word of honor, Caroline, I always feel when I look at the divine Araminta that I want to shed tears."

Caroline Crewkerne snorted.

"Cheriton," said she, "I have noticed that when a man begins life as a cynic he invariably ends as a sentimentalist."

"Caroline," said her old friend, sighing deeply, "you are a pagan. You have no soul."

"Burden has a soul," said the contemptuous Caroline. "In my opinion she would be better without it."

"How ironical it is," said Cheriton, "that you,

who distrust art so profoundly, should have such a masterpiece in your drawing-room."

"I am given to understand that a committee would like to buy it for the nation," said the owner of the masterpiece, with a gleam of malice.

"Caroline, you promised years ago that if the time ever came when money could buy Araminta she should go to Cheriton House."

"Well, the time has not come yet."

"When it does come, I shall hold you to your promise."

While Cheriton continued his examination of Gainsborough's masterpiece, Caroline Crewkerne said to her gentlewoman—

"Burden, get my spectacles."

Cheriton turned away from the picture at last. Naturally enough his gaze alighted on the sofa. Sitting in the center thereof was the wonderful Miss Perry. She was still at Slocum Magna. She had got to her third slice of bread and jam. Polly was pouring out a second sensible cup. Dearest Papa had just made one of his jokes. Charley and Milly were conducting an argument as to who was entitled to the cake with the currants in it. Miss Perry's blue eyes were unmistakably moist; and although she was not actually sucking her finger, there could be no doubt that at any moment she might begin to do so. And the inverted vegetable basket that crowned her seemed to flop more than ever.

It was no wonder that Cheriton gave a little exclamation. A lover of beauty in all its manifestations,

he had an eye for nature as well as for art. And here, side by side with Gainsborough's masterpiece, making due allowance for a number of trifling details which did not in the least affect the subject, was an almost exact replica of that immortal work. Cheriton, in spite of his foibles, had the seeing eye. Notwithstanding the cobbled boots, the print frock, and the cloak with the hood, one thing was clear. Here was Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, in the flesh.

He swung round to his old friend with the glass leaping out of his eye.

"Caroline," he cried, "a throwback!"

That old woman gazed through her spectacles at the occupant of the sofa. Miss Perry, still at Slocum Magna, was debating seriously whether a fourth slice of bread and jam was within the range of practical politics.

"Cheriton," said Caroline, coolly, "I believe you are right."

Surprise and enthusiasm began to work great havoc with the amateur of the fine arts.

"Upon my word," said he, "it is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen in my life. A pretty trick of old Mother Nature's."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said Caroline, warningly.

"A perfect throwback!" said that amateur.

Once more his gaze was brought to bear on the distracting occupant of the sofa, whose hair was the color of daffodils and whose eyes reminded him of the

sky of Italy. He approached her with an *empressement* that was tremendous.

"I have no need to ask," said he, "whether the famous duchess is a kinswoman."

Miss Perry returned from Slocum Magna with a little start. She removed her finger from her lip, yet her thoughts were not of famous duchesses.

In the meantime the redoubtable Caroline said nothing. All the same she was watching everything with those relentless eyes of hers.

Miss Perry exhibited neither surprise nor embarrassment at being summoned so peremptorily from Slocum Magna by such a magnificent specimen of the human race. Perhaps her wonderful blue eyes opened a little wider and she may or she may not have hoisted a little color; but it really seemed as though her thoughts were more concerned with bread and jam than with Lord Cheriton.

"Will you pardon an old worshiper of your famous ancestress if he asks your name?" said he. "I hope and believe it is a legitimate curiosity."

Miss Featherbrain made an effort to cease woolgathering. She smiled with a friendliness that would have disarmed a satyr.

"My name is Araminta," she drawled in her hopelessly ludicrous manner, "but they call me Goose because I am *rather* a Sil-lay."

Cheriton gave a chuckle of sheer human pleasure. He was to be pardoned for feeling that a new delight had been offered to an existence which had long exhausted every æsthetic form of joy.

"Your name is Araminta," he repeated by a kind of hypnotic process, "but they call you Goose because you are *rather* a silly."

Miss Perry rewarded Lord Cheriton with an indulgent beam. It assured him that he had had the good fortune to interpret her correctly. It was not easy for that connoisseur to withdraw his enchanted gaze. However, at last he contrived to do so. He turned to his old friend.

"Caroline," said he, "the fairies have fulfilled my wish. I have always wanted to meet a Gainsborough in the flesh and to hear what she had to say for herself. And now I have done so I know why Gainsborough painted 'em."

"Faugh!" said the old lady, vigorously, "sentimentality is the national bane."

"No, Caroline," said Cheriton, sadly, "you've no soul. Why don't you present me?"

"My niece, Miss Perry," said Caroline. "Lord Cheriton, my old friend."

"Oh, how do you do?" said Miss Perry, shooting forth her hand in her own private and particular manner to Aunt Caroline's old friend. "I hope you are quite well."

The manner in which Cheriton enclosed the ample paw of Miss Perry, which nevertheless, speaking relatively, contrived to appear long and slender, in his own delicately manicured fingers was almost epic.

"Miss Perry," said he, "this is a great moment in my life."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne with great energy.

No one made fuller use than that old woman of the privilege accorded to age of being as rude as it pleases. But it was so necessary that the wearer of the vegetable basket should not get notions under it before she had been in Hill Street an hour.

"My dear Miss Perry," said Cheriton, with the magniloquent air with which he asked an occasional question in the Hereditary Chamber, "are you acquainted with the vast metropolis?"

"I have always lived at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry with perfect simplicity.

"Really," said my lord, with an insincere surprise. "By the way, where *is* Slocum Magna?"

Doubtless owing to the fact that she was a duke's granddaughter, Miss Perry had excellent if somewhat rustic breeding. Brains were not her strong point, but she had been long enough in London to anticipate almost instinctively Lord Cheriton's inquiry. Moreover, her astonishment at the ignorance of London people was softened by the friendly indulgence she extended to everybody on the slightest pretext.

"Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, without the least appearance of didacticism, "is the next village to Widdiford. They haven't *quite* got the railway at Widdiford yet, don't you know, but it is only three miles away."

The absence of the railway at Widdiford appeared to decide Cheriton upon his course of action. With

the air of a man whose mind is quite made up, he addressed the fair inhabitant of Slocum Magna, North Devon.

"As an old friend of your accomplished aunt's," said he, "of many years' standing, I feel that during your sojourn in the vast metropolis it is only wise and right that I should act, as it were, *in loco parentis.*"

Although Miss Perry's papa was a very good classic, he had been unable to communicate his excellence in the dead languages to his second daughter. Miss Perry made no secret of the fact that she had an earnest desire for a little more enlightenment.

"A sort of combination, you know," said Cheriton, lucidly, "of a courier and a cicerone and a sincere well-wisher. One feels sure it will help you at first to have some one to guide you through the traffic."

"Burden is quite competent to see that she doesn't get run over," said the accomplished aunt of Miss Perry.

"Also, my dear Miss Perry," said Cheriton, mellifluously, "you may require a little advice occasionally from a man of the world. The vast metropolis is full of pitfalls for your sex."

"We have poachers at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry.

"The metropolis is different," said Cheriton. "I regret to say it harbors every known form of wickedness."

Miss Perry's eyes opened so wide that they seemed to magnetize my lord.

"Are there r-r-robbers?"

"A great number. They lurk in every thoroughfare. If you are really unacquainted with the vast metropolis I urgently recommend advice and protection."

"How splendid!" said Miss Perry. "I shall write to tell Muffin."

"Would it be an unpardonable curiosity if one inquired who is Muffin?"

"My sister, don't you know; her name is Elizabeth really. But we call her Muffin because she is *rather* a ragamuffin."

"Your family appears to be a singularly interesting one, if one may presume to form an estimate."

"Papa says we are none of us very bright, but we are all of us very healthy, except Doggo, who has had the mange twice."

My lord found it necessary to repeat the dictum of Miss Perry's papa. He then sat down beside her in a truly paternal manner.

"Tell me about your papa," said he, musically. "I am immensely interested in him. One feels one ought to have so many things in common with such a papa as yours."

"Papa is just as sweet——" began Miss Perry, with a perfectly delightful fervency. But she got no farther.

Aunt Caroline uplifted an immutable finger.

"Araminta," said she, "it is time you went up to dress. Burden, take her to her room."

Miss Perry rose at once with a docility that was charming. She bestowed her most frankly indulgent beam upon Lord Cheriton, and quitted the drawing-room in Miss Burden's custody.

Cheriton screwed his glass into his astonished eye to gaze after such magnificence.

"A goddess!" said he. "Juno! A great work of nature."

He prepared to take his leave.

"I am afraid, Caroline," said he, "your memory begins to fail a little."

"Rubbish."

"Do you know how long it is since you asked me to dine with you?"

"You refused three times running. I am determined that no human being shall refuse a fourth."

"Well, you know," said Cheriton, coolly, "you were just a little difficult the last twice I dined with you, and the wine was abominable. And with all that excellent claret that you have, and that '63 port, and that really priceless madeira—really, Caroline, considering what your cellar can do if it chooses, the wine was unpardonable. Still, I am in no sense a vindictive man. I'll dine with you this evening."

"Thank you, Cheriton," said Caroline, dryly. "Eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock."

My lord took his leave with a jauntiness that recalled the vanished era of his youth.

Two hours later the noble earl was back in Hill

Street. He looked particularly *soigné* in the choicest of evening clothes. They fitted his corseted form to perfection.

"Where is the fair Miss Araminta?" said he, yielding his arm to his hostess.

"My niece is dining upstairs this evening," said Caroline Crewkerne.

Profoundly distrusting the appearance of the sherry and the claret, the guest made a modest demand for whisky and soda. The fare was scanty, but what there was of it was not ill cooked. Also Caroline was not so tiresome as he had anticipated. Doubtless she was a little exhilarated by the doings of the day. She was a very sharp-witted old woman. Her shrewdness had already foreseen that the appearance of a highly original niece in a somewhat moribund *ménage* might bring renegades back to Hill Street craving pardon. A glimpse of the immediate future was afforded by the spectacle of a peculiarly spick and span Cheriton seated between Miss Burden and herself.

The turn of events lent an old-time pungency to what had once ranked as the most malicious tongue in London.

"Upon my honor," said the enchanted guest, "my dear Caroline, you are quite at your high-water mark this evening."

Caroline valued that kind of compliment, and she acquiesced in it grimly. Cheriton's remark was quite sincere; and in order to attest his *bona fides* he told a story that caused Miss Burden to spill the salt, while

only the intervention of a miracle averted a more signal disaster to the claret.

Cheriton was duly rewarded. By the time they had got to the mahogany—Caroline Crewkerne was a stickler for old fashions—the hostess said in an aside to Mr. Marchbanks, "The madeira and the '63 port wine."

There can be little doubt that Cheriton was sustained throughout a not particularly exhilarating function by the hope of seeing the peerless Miss Araminta in the drawing-room afterwards. In this, however, he was disappointed. The tardy minutes passed, but Miss Araminta did not appear. At last in desperation he was moved to inquire—

"Where hides the reluctant fair?"

"Speak English, Cheriton."

"The adorable Miss Perry."

"The creature is in bed," said Caroline, incisively. "It is a long journey from Slocum Magna for a growing girl."

"Is one given to understand that she made the whole journey in a single day?"

"In something under twenty-four hours, I believe," said Caroline. "Express trains travel at such a remarkable rate in these days."

In the circumstances there was only one thing for Cheriton to do, and this he did. He took his leave.

In the privacy of his hansom on the way to the Gaiety Theatre he ruminated exceedingly.

"That old woman," he mused, "has got all the trumps in her hand again. A disagreeable old thing,

but she does know how to play her cards when she gets 'em."

The stall next to Cheriton's was in the occupation of no less a person than George Betterton.

"Hallo, George," said he; "you in London!"

"Ye-es," said George, heavily. He did not seem to be altogether clear upon the point. "The War Office people are in their usual mess with the Militia."

"But *she* is at Biarritz."

"I have another one now," said George, succinctly.

The noise and flamboyance of the ballet rendered further conversation undesirable. However, Cheriton took up the thread of discourse at the end of the act.

"George," said he, with considerable solemnity, "like myself you have grown old in the love of art."

George's assent was of the gruffest. Cheriton was going to be a bore as usual.

"You remember that Gainsborough of Caroline Crewkerne's?"

"Ye-es," said George. "I offered her twenty thousand pounds for it for the Cheadle Collection."

"Did you, though! Well, mind you don't renew the offer. The refusal of it was promised to me in Crewkerne's lifetime."

George began to gobble furiously. He looked as though he wanted to call some one a liar.

"Well, it's too soon to quarrel over it," said Cheriton, pacifically, "because she doesn't intend to part with it to anybody at present."

"She's a perverse old woman," said George, "and age don't improve her."

"I mentioned her Gainsborough," said Cheriton, who was on the rack of his own enthusiasm, "because a very odd thing has happened. The original of that picture has found her way into Hill Street."

"What! Grandmother Dorset!" said George, contemptuously. "Why, she's been in her grave a hundred years."

"An absolute throwback has turned up at Hill Street," said Cheriton, impressively. "If you want to see a living and breathing Gainsborough walking and talking in twentieth-century London call on Caroline Crewkerne some wet afternoon."

George Betterton was not at all æsthetically minded. But like so many of his countrymen he always had a taste for "something fresh."

"I will," he said. And he spoke as if he meant it.

Then it was that Cheriton grew suddenly alive to the magnitude of his indiscretion. Really he had acted with consummate folly! He had a clear start of all the field, yet through an unbridled natural enthusiasm and a lifelong love of imparting information he must needs within an hour set one of the most dangerous men in England upon the scent.

George Betterton had his limitations, but where the other sex was concerned he was undoubtedly that, as Cheriton had reason to know. A widower of nine and fifty, who had buried two wives without finding an heir to his great estates, there was little doubt that he meant to come up to the scratch for the third time, although to be sure of late his courses had not

seemed to lead in that direction. But Caroline Crewkerne, who knew most things, seemed quite clear upon the point.

Yes, George Betterton's "I will" had a sinister sound about it. Cheriton himself was five and sixty and a bachelor, and in his heart of hearts he had good reason to believe that he was not a marrying man. He had long owed his primal duty to a position in the world; and, to the scorn of his family and the amusement of his friends, he had not yet fulfilled it. He was too fond of adventures, he declared romantically—a confession that a man old enough to be a grandfather ought to be ashamed to make, declared the redoubtable Caroline, with her most fearsome snort. More than once, it is true, Cheriton had fancied he had seen the writing on the wall. But when his constitutional apathy permitted him to examine it more closely, he found it had been written for some one else.

However, he had come away from Hill Street that evening in such a state of suppressed enthusiasm, that in his present mood he was by no means sure that he had not seen the writing again. It was certainly odd that a man with his record and at his time of life should have any such feeling. But there is no accounting for these things. Therefore he left the theater with an idea taking root in him that he had been guilty of an act of gross folly in blowing the trumpet so soon. Why should he help to play Caroline's game? He should have left it to her to summon this Richmond to the field.

"Caroline will lead him a dance, though," mused Cheriton on the threshold of Ward's. "And I know how to handle the ribands better than he does. He's got the mind of a dromedary, thank God!"

In the meantime the cause of these reflections was lying very forlorn and very wide-awake in the most imposing chamber in which she had ever slept. The bed was large, but cold; the chintz hangings were immaculate, but unsympathetic; the engravings of classical subjects and of august relations whom she had never seen with which the walls were hung, the austere magnificence of the furniture, and the expensive nature of the bric-à-brac, made Miss Perry yearn exceedingly for the cheerful simplicity of Slocum Magna.

Almost as far back as Miss Perry could remember, it had been given to her before attempting repose to beat Muffin over the head with a pillow. But in this solemn piece of upholstery, which apparently had been designed for an empress, such friendly happenings as these were out of the question.

However, she had Tobias with her. The wicker basket was on a little lacquered table beside her bed; and as she lay, with a slow and silent tear squeezing itself at regular intervals out of her blue eyes, she had her right hand resting firmly but affectionately on the lid of Tobias's local habitation. That quaint animal, all unconscious of the honor done to him, was wrapped in slumber, with his ugly brown nose tucked under his lean brown paws.

Thus was Miss Perry discovered at a quarter to

eleven that evening when Miss Burden entered to embrace her.

"I want to go home to Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, with a drawl and a sob whose united effect must have been supremely ridiculous had it not been the offspring of legitimate pathos.

Miss Burden offered her the consolation of one intimately acquainted with pathos. Every night for many long and weary years she had longed to go home to her own rustic hermitage, which, however, had no existence outside her fancy.

"Dearest Araminta," said Miss Burden, caressing her affectionately, "you will soon get used to the strangeness."

"I want to go home to Slocum Magna," sobbed Miss Perry.

"I am sure you are a good and brave and noble girl," said Miss Burden, who believed profoundly in goodness and bravery and nobility.

"Papa said I was," sobbed Miss Perry, settling her hand more firmly than ever upon the basket of Tobias.

"To-morrow you will feel happier, Araminta dearest," said Miss Burden, bestowing a final hug upon the distressed Miss Perry.

Miss Burden was guilty of saying that which she did not believe, but let us hope no one will blame her.

CHAPTER VIII

"CAROLINE CREWKERNE'S GAINSBOROUGH"

FROM the moment that "Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough" came upon the town there was no denying her success. She was a new sensation; and happy in her sponsors the diminished glories of Hill Street emerged from their eclipse. If old Lady Crewkerne derived a grim satisfaction from the absolute possession of the nine days' wonder, Cheriton was one of the proudest and happiest men in London. He took to himself the whole merit of the discovery.

"I assure you," he declared to a circle of the elect, "that blind old woman would never have seen the likeness. It was quite providential that I happened to look in and point it out."

In matters of art Cheriton's taste was really fastidious. And in addition to his other foibles no man was more susceptible to beauty. Every morning for a week he called at Hill Street, to view his discovery more adequately in the full light of day. It was in vain, however, that he tried to surprise her. She was kept very close.

For one thing the creature had positively no clothes in which to submit to the ordeal of the public gaze. Almost the first thing Caroline Crewkerne did was to send for her dressmaker, who was commanded to

make Miss Perry "appear respectable," and was given only three days in which to perform the operation.

"I assure your ladyship it is impossible in three days," said the dressmaker.

"If that is your opinion," said her ladyship, "I shall go elsewhere."

As it was her ladyship's custom to pay her bills quarterly, on the morning of the fourth day Miss Perry came down to breakfast in a blue-serge costume. It was rigid in outline and formal in cut. In fact, it had been chosen by Miss Burden, and had been wrought in the style affected by that model of reticent good taste.

It was in this attire, surmounted by a straw hat of the regulation type in lieu of the inverted vegetable basket, that Cheriton saw Miss Perry for the second time.

"What are you thinking of, Caroline?" said he tragically. "Where is your instinct? It is a gross act of vandalism to consign a genuine Gainsborough to the tender mercies of a woman's tailor."

"Pooh," said Caroline.

All the same Cheriton was roused to action. At noon next day a cab appeared at the door of Caroline's residence. It contained a milliner and twenty-two hats in twenty-two boxes. The milliner said she had instructions to wait for Lord Cheriton.

The redoubtable Caroline's first instinct was to order the milliner off the premises.

"Gross impertinence," she declared.

However, the perverse old woman had a liberal share of reason. Cheriton had his foibles, but emphatically he knew on which side of the bread to look for the butter. In all matters relating to this world, from racehorses to French millinery, wise people respected his judgment.

At five minutes after midday Cheriton himself appeared in the company of an amiable, courteous, and distinguished foreigner.

"What, pray, is the meaning of this invasion?" said Caroline, with a snort of hostility.

"This is Monsieur Duprez," said Cheriton, "the great genius who comes to London twice a year from Raquin's at Paris."

Monsieur Duprez, overwhelmed by this melodious flattery, very nearly touched the Persian carpet with his nose. Caroline scowled at him.

"Cheriton," said she, "who has given you authority to turn my house into a dressmaker's shop?"

"I have the authority," said Cheriton, "of a pure taste unvitiated by Whig prejudice and Victorian tradition. Miss Burden, will you have the great goodness to summon Nature's masterpiece so that Art, her handmaiden, may make an obeisance to her; and might I also suggest that you procure Lady Crewkerne's knitting?"

Miss Burden, thrilled by the unmistakable impact of romance, waited with animation for permission to obey my lord.

"I will not have my niece tricked out like a play-

actress," said Caroline. "Cheriton, understand that clearly."

Cheriton, feeling his position to be impregnable. was as cool as you please. As is the case with so many people, his coolness bordered upon insolence. Caroline was so much the slave of her worldly wisdom that in a case of this kind she would be compelled to bow the knee to an array of acknowledged experts. Besides, it was so easy for Cheriton to justify himself in the most dramatic manner. He pointed histrionically to the world-famous Duchess of Dorset.

"Caroline," said he, "if you will take the advice of an old friend you will attend to your knitting. Three experts are present. They can be trusted to deal with this matter effectually. Indeed, I might say four. Miss Burden, I know you to be in cordial sympathy with the highest in whatever form it may manifest itself. Therefore I entreat you, particularly as the time of Monsieur Duprez and Madame Pelissier belongs not to themselves, nor to us, but to civilization, to produce our great work of Nature, in order that her handmaiden Art may deck her."

Caroline's hostile upper lip took a double curl, a feat which was the outcome of infinite practice in the expression of scorn.

"I hope you will not put ideas into the creature's head, that's all," said she. "Fortunately she is such a born simpleton that it is doubtful whether she is capable of retaining any. Burden, you may fetch her."

It was a charming April morning, and the sunshine was flooding the room. It made a canopy for Miss Perry as she came in simply and modestly through the drawing-room door. At once it challenged that wonderful yellow mane of hers that was the color of daffodils, which on its own part seemed to reciprocate the flashing caresses of the light of the morning. The yellow mane appeared to grow incandescent and shoot out little lights of its own. The glamor of pink and white and azure was very wonderful, too, as the sunlight wantoned with it in its own inimitable manner. Here was Juno indeed, and none recognized the fact so clearly as the Prince of the Morning.

Monsieur Duprez's eyes sparkled; Madame Pelissier gave a little exclamation.

"You have here a great subject," said Lord Cheriton to those rare artists. "And there you have the manner in which the great Gainsborough treated it."

Madame Pelissier disclosed her creations. Hat after hat was fitted to the daffodil-colored mane. Cheriton hovered round and round the young goddess, surveying each separate effect from every point of view. His gravity could not have been excelled by a minister of state.

"They must be enormous," said he, with ever-mounting enthusiasm. "They must sit at the perfect angle. They must be of the hue of the wing of the raven. Yes, feathers decidedly. And they must flop like the dooce."

"Cheriton," said the warning voice, "don't be a coxcomb."

"Yes, I like that wicker-work arrangement. The way it flops is capital. It will do for week-days. But there must be one for Sunday mornings in which to go to church."

Madame Pelissier was inclined to be affronted by Cheriton's extreme fastidiousness. There was not a single creation in the whole collection which had quite got "that," he declared, snapping his fingers in the manner of Sir Joshua.

"Madame Pelissier," said he, solemnly, "it comes to this. You will have to invoke your genius to create a Sunday hat for Juno. You observe what Gainsborough did for her great-grandmamma. Mark well that masterpiece, dear Madame Pelissier, for je prends mon bien où je le trouve."

"Carte blanche, milor?" said Madame Pelissier, with a little shrug.

"Absolument," said my lord. "Give a free rein to your genius, ma chère madame. Crown the young goddess with the noblest creation that ever consecrated the drab pavement of Bond Street."

"I warn you, Cheriton," said the aunt of the young goddess, "I will not have the creature figged out like a ballet-dancer or a female in a circus."

"Peace, Caroline. Where is your knitting?" He shook a finger of warning at her. "Really, Caroline, you must refrain from philistine observations in the presence of those who are dedicated to the service of art."

Caroline snorted with great energy.

Monsieur Duprez, crowing with delight, was absorbing Gainsborough's masterpiece.

"I haf it," said he, tapping the center of his forehead, "ze very ting."

"May it prove so, my dear Duprez, for then we shall have a nine days' wonder for the town."

Thus it will be seen that in the beginning "Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough," as she was so soon to be christened by the privileged few who write the labels of history, owed much to Cheriton's foresight, judgment, and undoubted talent for stage management.

She really made her début at Saint Sepulchre's Church—in which sacred and fashionable edifice, I regret to say, her aunt Caroline was an infrequent worshiper—and afterwards in Hyde Park on the second Sunday morning in May.

At least a fortnight before the great occasion Cheriton had declared his intention to the powers that obtained in Hill Street of making Miss Perry known to London on the first really bright and warm Sunday morning that came along. Thanks to the behavior of providence, her church-going clothes arrived the evening before the weather; whilst only a few hours previously a deft-fingered jewel of a maid had arrived expressly from Paris, at the instance of the experts, who was learned in the set of the most marvelous frocks and hats, and who also was a rare artist in the human hair.

Therefore let none confess to surprise that Miss

Perry was the innocent cause of some excitement when she burst upon an astonished world. Mr. Marchbanks was the first to behold Miss Perry, when on this historic second Sunday morning in May she quitted the privacy of her chamber fittingly clothed to render homage to her Maker. He beheld her as she came down the marble staircase in an enormous black hat with a wonderful feather, a miracle of harmonious daring, and in a lilac frock, not answering, it is true, in every detail to that in which her famous great-grandmamma had been painted by Gainsborough, but none the less a triumph for all concerned in it. However, to judge by the demeanor of shocked stupefaction of the virtuous man who first encountered it, who himself was about to accompany Mrs. Plunket to Divine worship, this was an achievement that was not to the taste of everybody. In the opinion of Mr. Marchbanks it might be magnificent, but it was not religion.

By one of those coincidences in which real life indulges so recklessly, Miss Perry had not reached the bottom of the stairs when Cheriton, duly admitted by John, and himself armed *cap-à-pie* for Divine worship in a brand-new wig, with freshly dyed mustache, light gray trousers, lilac gloves, white gaiters, and a gardenia in his buttonhole, was enabled to take up a strategical position in the entrance-hall.

His greeting was almost as melodramatic as his appearance.

"A positive triumph!" he cried. "My dear young lady—my dear Miss Perry—my dear Miss Ara-

minta, the highest hopes of a sanguine temperament have been exceeded. Art, the handmaiden, has done her work nobly, but of course the real triumph belongs to Nature."

"Isn't my new frock a nice one?" said Miss Perry.

"Incomparable."

"It is almost as nice as the mauve one Muffin had last summer but one," said Miss Perry.

It seemed to Cheriton that the speech of Miss Perry was absurdly suited to her clothes. He led her proudly to the morning-room.

"Caroline," said he, "prepare for the conquest of London."

That old woman had never looked so fierce. As a preliminary she snuffed the air.

"Burden," said she, "cease behaving like a fool and have the goodness to get my spectacles."

Miss Burden obeyed her in a kind of delirium. The scrutiny of the powers was severe and prolonged. There was no approbation in it.

"An old-fashioned respect for the English Sunday," said Caroline, "precludes my going to church with a *tableau vivant*."

Cheriton scorned her openly.

"You perverse woman," said he, "why are you so blind? Here is a triumph that will ring through the town. Are you prepared to identify yourself with it or are you not?"

Caroline Crewkerne subjected her niece to a second prolonged and severe scrutiny.

"Humph," said she, ungraciously.

However, she was a very shrewd old woman. Further, she was a very clear-sighted old woman, who knew herself to be what Cheriton did not hesitate to proclaim her. She was a philistine. Upon any matter which impinged upon life's amenities she was far too wise to trust her own judgment. Cheriton, on the other hand, in spite of an inclination towards the bizarre and the freakish, she allowed to have taste.

"I shall go to church," she announced to her gentlewoman.

She spoke as if she were flinging down a gauntlet.

The Church of Saint Sepulchre, as the elect do not need to be told, is quite near to Hill Street. Caroline Crewkerne was ready to start ten minutes before the service began.

"Easy, Caroline," said Cheriton, studying his watch reflectively; "there is no hurry."

"Even if they bore one," said Caroline, "it is not good manners to be disrespectful to the officiating clergy."

Cheriton, however, although he advanced no positive reasons why disrespect should be offered to the officiating clergy, showed a marked disposition for Divine Service to begin without him. He loitered and loitered upon absurdly flimsy pretexts. And just as the procession was about to start from the door of Caroline's residence he mislaid his umbrella.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH CHERITON DROPS HIS UMBRELLA

"NEVER mind your umbrella," said Caroline, tartly.

"I must mind my umbrella," said Cheriton, plaintively. "If one attends Divine worship in London in the middle of the season without one's umbrella, one is bound to be taken for an agnostic."

"John," demanded Caroline, "what have you done with his lordship's umbrella?"

"You placed it here, my lord," said John, indicating an umbrella with an ivory handle and a gold band.

"Nonsense," said Cheriton. "I don't own an umbrella with an ivory handle."

John looked at the gold band and assured his lordship imperturbably that his name was upon it. Cheriton examined it himself.

"It is the name of my father," said he. "How the dooce did an umbrella with an ivory handle come into the possession of my father!"

The clock in the hall slowly chimed eleven. The procession started for Saint Sepulchre's with the redoubtable Caroline in a decidedly unchristian temper, with Miss Burden profoundly uncomfortable, with Miss Perry innocently absorbed in her new frock and

preoccupied with the modest hope that the passers-by would notice it; whilst Cheriton walked by her side apparently without a thought in his head save the ethical significance of an ivory-handled umbrella.

"I remember now, my dear Miss Araminta," said he. "It was given to my grandfather of pious memory as a token of esteem by that singularly constituted monarch George the Fourth."

"I am sure it must be almost as nice as Muffin's was," said Miss Perry. "That old gentleman with the white mustache turned round to look at it."

"Did he?" said Cheriton, fixing his eyeglass truculently.

"Muffin's was mauve," said Miss Perry. "But I think lilac is almost as nice, don't you?"

"It is all a matter of taste, my dear Miss Araminta. Fancy one entering a church in the West End of London with an umbrella with an ivory handle!"

"Why shouldn't one, pray?" snorted Caroline from the recesses of her bath-chair.

"My dear Caroline," said Cheriton, "it looks so worldly."

"Humph!" said Caroline.

Scarcely had the procession reached the outer precincts of Saint Sepulchre's when its ears were smitten with the sound of a thousand fervent voices uplifted in adulation of their Creator.

"There, Cheriton," said Caroline, "now you are satisfied. We are late."

This fact, however, did not seem to perturb Cheriton as much as it ought to have done. He even deprecated the alacrity with which Caroline left her bath-chair, and the determined manner in which she prepared to head the procession into the sacred edifice.

"Easy, Caroline," said he. "Let 'em get fairly on to their legs."

As the procession filed very slowly down the central aisle with the fervent voices still upraised and the organ loudly pealing, more than one pair of eyes took their fill of it. There was not a worshiper within those four walls who did not know who the old woman was with the hawklike features and the ebony walking-stick. Nor were they at a loss for the identity of the distinguished if slightly overdressed gentleman who came in her train. Moreover, the wonderful creature in the picture hat and the lilac frock did not fail to inspire their curiosity.

Caroline Crewkerne's pew was at the far end of the church, next but two to the chancel. The procession had reached the middle of the central aisle when there came a brief lull in the proceedings. The organ was muffled in a passage of peculiar solemnity; the fervor of the voices was subdued in harmony; there was hardly a sound to be heard, when Cheriton had the misfortune to drop his umbrella.

The sound of the ivory handle resolutely meeting cold marble at such an intensely solemn moment was really dramatic. Not a person throughout the whole of the sacred edifice who could fail to hear the impact

of the ill-fated umbrella. For the umbrella was indeed ill-fated. The ivory handle lay upon the marble, shivered in three pieces. Almost every eye in the church seemed to be fixed upon the owner of the umbrella. A wave of indignation, which seemed to make the air vibrate, appeared to pass over the congregation. Not only did the owner of the umbrella come late to church, but he must needs disturb the sanctity of the occasion by mundanely dropping his umbrella with extraordinary violence and publicity.

From a little to the left of Cheriton, as he stood ruefully surveying the wreck of his umbrella, there penetrated cool and youthful tones.

"My aunt!" they said, "who is the gal the old blighter's got with him?"

"Sssh, Archibald!" came a sibilant whisper; and then arose a louder and more decisive, "Overdressed!"

A drawl that was charmingly sympathetic, yet of a length that was really absurd, seemed to float all over the church in the most delightfully subtle convolutions.

"What a pity!" it could be heard to proclaim by all in the vicinity. "It cannot be mended. They couldn't mend Muffin's when she dropped hers at the Hobson baby's christening."

With a naturalness so absolute did the Amazon with the daffodil-colored mane stoop to assist her cavalier to retrieve the fragments of the shattered umbrella, that it seemed almost to the onlookers that

she had mistaken the central aisle of Saint Sepulchre's at 11:15 a.m. on the second Sunday in May for the middle of Exmoor.

"My aunt!" said the cool and youthful tones, "the gal's tophole."

"Sssh, Archibald!" said the sibilant whisper. "Dear me, what loud manners! Sssh, Archibald! don't speak during the Confession."

Caroline Crewkerne and her gentlewoman had been kneeling devoutly upon their hassocks for at least two minutes by the time Cheriton and Miss Perry arrived at the second pew from the chancel. Cheriton bore in his right hand a fragment of ivory; in the left the decapitated body of his umbrella. Somehow his expression of rue did not seem to be quite so sincere as the circumstances and the surroundings warranted. In the right hand of Miss Perry was a prayer-book; in the left two fragments of ivory. The gravity of her demeanor was enough to satisfy the most sensitive beholder.

After the service, as Caroline Crewkerne's party was moving out of the church, it was joined by no less a person than George Betterton. Like Caroline herself, he was an infrequent worshiper at Saint Sepulchre's.

"Hallo, George!" said Cheriton. "What the dooce has brought you to church?"

Cheriton was not sincere in his inquiry. He knew perfectly well what had brought George to church. The responsibility for his appearance there was his entirely.

"The weather, Cheriton," growled George solemnly. "Fine mornin' to hear a good sermon."

"I don't approve of candles on the altar," said Caroline Crewkerne in a voice that all the world might heed. "Far too many Roman practices have crept into the service lately."

"You are perfectly right, Caroline," said Cheriton. "That is my opinion. I intend to lodge a complaint with the Vicar."

"How are you, Caroline?" said George, with affability. "It is a great pleasure to see you at church."

"It is a pleasure you might afford yourself oftener," said Caroline, grimly.

George cast an envious eye to the front. Cheriton, walking with the lilac frock and the picture hat ten paces ahead of the bath-chair, appeared to be coming in for a good deal of public attention.

"How does it feel, Caroline," said George Betterton, "to go to church with Grandmother Dorset?"

"Do you mean my niece, Miss Perry?" said she, huffily.

"Perry, eh? A girl of Polly's?"

"Don't you see the likeness?" said Caroline, with a little snort.

"No, I don't," said George. "She resembles Polly about as much as Cheriton resembles a Christian."

"I agree with you, George," said Caroline Crewkerne.

"She reminds me of what you were in the 'Fifties, Caroline," said George, obviously trying to be agreeable.

"A compliment," sneered its recipient.

"Gal's on the big side. A reg'lar bouncer; but, by George——!"

His grace paused on the apostrophe to his natal saint.

"Carries her clothes like Grandmother Dorset," said he.

"It is a great responsibility," said Caroline, "for a woman of my age to have a creature like that to look after."

"Money?"

"Not a sou."

"Pity," said George, whose standards were frankly utilitarian. "Fine-looking gal. Cheriton appears to think so."

By now the space between the bath-chair and the first pair in the procession had been increased to twenty paces.

"Cheriton," called the old lady, "this is not a coursing match."

Cheriton checked politely to await the arrival of the powers.

"Dear me!" said he; "*are* we walking quickly? Miss Araminta moves like a fawn in her own West country."

"Girl," said the old lady, "don't walk so quickly. You are now in Hyde Park, not in a lane in Devonshire."

"You come from Devon," said George Betterton, addressing Miss Perry with an air of remarkable benevolence, "where the cream comes from, eh?"

If we assert positively that Miss Perry made a gesture of licking her lips in a frankly feline manner, we lay ourselves open to a scathing rebuke from the feminine section of our readers. They will assure us that no true lady would be guilty of such an act when walking in Hyde Park on a Sunday morning with the highest branch of the peerage. Yet we are by no means certain she did not. At least, the gesture she made was highly reminiscent of a feat of that nature.

"They promised to send me some from the Parsonage," said Miss Perry, wistfully, "but it hasn't come yet."

"Shame!" said his grace, with deep feeling. "I'll go round to Buszard's first thing to-morrer and tell 'em to send you a pot."

"Oh, thank you so much," said Miss Perry.

"Pray don't mention it, my dear Miss——" said the Duke, with a somewhat heavy yet by no means unsuccessful air.

"My name is Araminta," drawled Miss Perry, with her usual formula; "but they call me Goose because I am *rather* a Sil-lay."

"Charmin'. Call you Goose, eh? Charmin' name."

"A silly name, isn't it?" said Miss Perry.

"Charmin'," said George. "Charmin' name. I'll call you Goose myself if you have no objection."

"Oh do, please," said Miss Perry, "then I shall know we are friends."

"Capital! Shall I tell you, Miss Goose, what they call me?"

"Oh do, please," said Miss Perry.

"They call me Gobo, because they say I gobble like a turkey."

"What fun!" cried Miss Perry. "What a splendid name! I shall write to tell Muffin about it."

Miss Perry's clear peal of laughter appeared to excite the curiosity of a particularly well-groomed and well-gowned section of the British public which occupied the chairs along the path. At all events, it eyed the slow-moving procession very intently.

"Here comes that gal," said the proprietor of the cool and youthful tones, removing a silver-mounted stick from his mouth. "She's got another old sportsman with her."

"Sssh, Archibald!" said the sibilant voice; "that is the Duke of Brancaster."

"He's a lucky old fellow," said the voice of youth. "But if I was that gal I wouldn't walk in the Park with a chap who has a face like an over-ripe tomato, and who gobbles like a turkey."

"Sssh, Archibald, *dearest!*"

The procession was now almost alongside the youthful critic. Miss Perry, a positive queen challenging the superb May morning in its glamor and its freshness, with her chin tilted at a rather proud angle, for she could not help rejoicing simply and sincerely in the attention that was paid to her new frock, was flanked upon the one hand by Cheriton, on the other by George Betterton. Ten paces in the rear came the bath-chair with its hawklike occupant. Beside it was Miss Burden with Ponto on a lead.

"I tell you what, mater," said the voice of youth. "If those two old bucks are not ridin' jealous they will be very soon."

"Sssh, my pet!" said mamma, placing a particularly neat suède over the mouth of young hopeful.

"If you call me Goose"—the deliciously ludicrous drawl was borne on the zephyrs of spring—"I may call you Gobo, may I not?"

"'Arry," said a bystander, with a gesture of ferocious disgust to a companion who embellished a frock-coat with a pair of brown boots, "that's what they call clawss. It fairly makes you sick. That's what comes of 'aving a 'ouse of Lords."

The proprietor of the brown boots assented heartily.

"If I was a nob," said he, "I would learn to respect meself."

The voice of command came forth from the bath-chair.

"George," it said, "have you noticed the tulips?"

"No," said George; "where are they?"

He looked down at his feet to see if he had trodden upon them.

"Burden," said the old lady, "take the Dook across the road to see the tulips."

Somewhat reluctantly, it must be confessed, his grace permitted himself to be conducted by Ponto and the faithful gentlewoman over the way to inspect these specimens of British horticulture.

"Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, "to-morrow

you must take my niece to view the National Gallery."

"That will be too sweet," said Miss Perry.

Cheriton bestowed upon his old friend and adversary a look of wariness tempered with gratitude.

CHAPTER X

JIM LASCELLES MAKES HIS APPEARANCE

Miss Araminta Perry, Hill Street, London, W., *to* Miss Elizabeth Perry, The Parsonage, Slocum Magna, North Devon.

DEAREST MUFFIN,—*London is a* much *larger place than Slocum Magna, but I don't think it is nearly so nice. I think if I had not got Tobias with me, sometimes I might be very miserable.*

First I must tell you about my new frock. It is a lilac one, and has been copied from a famous picture of Great Grandmamma Dorset by a painter named Gainsborough—I mean that Gainsborough copied Great Grandmamma Dorset, not that he made my frock. Madame Pelissier made my frock. It is not quite so nice as your mauve was, but it is much *admired by nearly everybody in London. When I walk out in it people often turn round to look at it.*

I think the people here are sometimes rather rude, but Lord Cheriton says I am not to mind, as people are like that in London. Lord Cheriton is a sweet. Aunt Caroline says he is much older than he looks, but Miss Burden doesn't think so. Aunt Caroline must be right, because

she is always right in everything, but Miss Burden is just a sweet. She comes to my room every night to see if I am miserable. She is very good to Tobias. Aunt Caroline says she is too romantic. She had a love affair when she was younger. Lord Cheriton says I must be careful that I don't have one, as they are so bad for the complexion. He says he knows as a fact that all the men in London are untrustworthy. He says oldish men, particularly if they have been married twice, are very dangerous. As Dearest Papa is not here to advise me, Lord Cheriton acts as he thinks Dearest Papa would like him to. He goes out with me everywhere to see that I come to no harm. Isn't it dear of him?

Yesterday Lord Cheriton took me to the Zoological Gardens to see the elephants. It was Aunt Caroline's suggestion. She thought we should find so many things in common. I think we did; at least I know we had one thing in common. We are both very *fond of cream buns. I had four, and one of the elephants had five. But Lord Cheriton says the elephants are so big you can't call them greedy. We also saw the bears. They each had a cream bun apiece. Lord Cheriton says each of them would have eaten another, but he thought it hardly right to encourage them.*

Lord Cheriton is a very high-principled man. He says I am to be very careful of a perfectly

charming old gentleman who calls most days to see Aunt Caroline. I call him Gobo because he gobbles like a turkey, and he calls me Goose because I am rather a silly. He is a Duke really. Lord Cheriton doesn't seem to trust him. He says it is because of his past life. I heard Lord Cheriton tell Aunt Caroline that she ought not to encourage the old reprobate *with me in the house. It is rather dreadful that he should be like that, because he is such a dear, although his face is so red and he gobbles like anything. He —Gobo—is going to give me a riding horse so that I can ride in Rotten Row, as it is so good for the health. He rides in Rotten Row every morning. He says my horse will be quite as nice as Squire Lascelles' pedigree hunter was. I don't think Lord Cheriton approves of it. He seems to doubt whether Dearest Papa would like me to be seen much in public with a man who has no principles.*

I have spoken to Miss Burden about it. But she agrees with Lord Cheriton in everything, because she considers he is the only perfect man she has ever met. Miss Burden says his ideals are so lofty. Aunt Caroline doesn't think so much of Lord Cheriton. She says that all men and most women are vain, selfish, worldly, and self-seeking. I wish Aunt Caroline could meet Dearest Papa. And you too, Muffin dearest. But I do think Aunt Caroline is mistaken about Lord Cheriton. I know that he pays great atten-

tion to his appearance, but I am perfectly sure he is a Sweet. If he were not, why should he take so much trouble over my lilac frock and my new hat, which I don't think I like because it makes people stare so; and why should he be so careful that I should come to no harm, and always try to act just as he thinks Dearest Papa would like him to? I am sure Aunt Caroline must be mistaken. It must be because people in London are always cynical. At least that is what Lord Cheriton says. He says there is something in the atmosphere of London that turns the milk of human kindness sour. Isn't it dreadful? I am so glad we haven't that kind of atmosphere at Slocum Magna, Muffin dearest.

Lord Cheriton is marvelously clever. Some of the words he uses are longer than Dearest Papa's. He says I am a Throwback. He won't tell me what it means. He says it is a dictionary word, yet I can't find it in Aunt Caroline's dictionary. Aunt Caroline says I am too inquisitive. Please ask Dearest Papa. He will certainly know.

Lord Cheriton is very good at poetry. He says it is because he went to the same school as Lord Byron. He has written what he calls an Ode to a Lilac Frock. It begins like this:—

> *Youth is so fair that the Morning's smile,*
> *Is touched with the glamor of a pure delight.*

I cannot remember any more, and Aunt Caroline

burnt the copy he gave me, herself personally. She said he was old enough to know better. But I think it is awfully clever of him, don't you, Muffin dearest? Miss Burden was very miserable about the Ode—I mean, of course, about Aunt Caroline burning it. She scorched her fingers in trying to rescue it from the flames. She has a new lilac frock, because Lord Cheriton admires lilac frocks so much. She looks a Sweet in it, although Aunt Caroline says she looks a perfect fright. Aunt Caroline always says what she means, but I don't think she always means what she says. She said some perfectly wicked things about Tobias when the poor darling escaped from his basket and hid behind the drawing-room curtains. But I think that was because Ponto was frightened. Ponto is a little Horror. I think I shall persuade Tobias to bite him.

Aunt Caroline says if I behave well I am to go to Buckingham Place to see the Queen. If I do go I am to have another new frock, although I am sure I shall never get one half so nice as my lilac is. I do wish I could go in that. I am sure the Queen would like it; but when I told Aunt Caroline she told me to hold my tongue. The frock I am going to see the Queen in is all white, which Lord Cheriton says is his favorite color because it is the emblem of virginal purity.

I have not had a single game of hockey since I came to London. Lord Cheriton says they only

play hockey in London when the Thames is frozen over, which happens only once in a blue moon. I do call that silly, don't you, Muffin dearest? when we have a mixed match at Slocum Magna every Wednesday all through the winter.

Last night I went to a party in my new evening frock. Everybody liked it—at least, they said they did. One or two young men told me they admired it immensely. Wasn't it dear of them? Lord C. and Gobo were there. They didn't think it was cut a bit too low. I am so pleased. I wish, Muffin dearest, that you and Polly and Milly had one like it, because I am sure it must be awfully expensive. And what do you think? Aunt Caroline has given me a string of pearls to wear with it which once belonged to Great Grandmamma Dorset. I do call that British, *don't you? They are supposed to be very valuable. Lord C. and Gobo both thought the party was a great success. Aunt Caroline went to sleep most of the evening.*

A fortnight next Wednesday Aunt Caroline is going to give a dance because of me. It was Lord Cheriton who persuaded her, and he is arranging everything. Aunt Caroline and he cannot agree about the champagne for supper. Aunt Caroline says that claret cup was considered good enough when she came out. Lord Cheriton says that civilization has advanced since those days. I thought it sounded unkind

to Aunt Caroline, but Miss Burden says Lord Cheriton can't help putting things epigrammatically.

Then, too, Muffin dearest, I must tell you that Aunt Caroline and Lord Cheriton have almost quarreled over Gobo. Lord C. insists upon not inviting the harmless old dear. He says if he comes to the ball he will abuse the wine, yet drink more of it than is good for him, and that he will play bridge all the evening and be a nuisance to everybody. Lord Cheriton says he always vitiates an atmosphere of virginal purity by saying and doing things that he oughtn't. I suppose Lord Cheriton will have to have his way, because he is acting as a sort of deputy to Dearest Papa. He has already kissed me several times "paternally," which is really awfully sweet of him; and every day he warns me to beware of Gobo and to be very careful that he does not go too far.

This is all this time, Muffin dearest. I send heaps and heaps of love and kisses to you and Polly and Milly and Dickie and Charley and poor blind Doggo; and to Dearest Papa I send twelve extra special kisses. I remain always your most affectionate sister

GOOSE.

P.S.—Tobias sends his fondest love.

This letter may enable the judicious to discern that although the conquest of London by the lilac

frock and the daffodil-colored mane proceeded apace, all was not harmony in Hill Street, W. To Cheriton's masterly stage management there can be no doubt much of the triumph was due, but he unfortunately was the last man in the world to underrate his own achievement. "Cheriton can't carry corn" was the trite but obviously just manner in which George Betterton summed up the situation.

No two persons knew Caroline Crewkerne quite so well as these old cronies. And no one save Caroline Crewkerne knew them quite so well as they knew each other. It required a very experienced hand to hold the balance even between them. Let it be said at once that one was forthcoming in that very worldly wise old woman.

This was quite as it should be. For it was wonderful how soon it was bruited about in the parish that two Richmonds had already entered the field. Both were eligible, mature, and distinguished men, and both were more popular than in Caroline's opinion they ought to have been. As she said in her sarcastic manner, she knew them both too well to have any illusions about them. Les hommes moyens sensuels, said she.

Not, of course, that Caroline's opinion prevented their entrances and exits in Hill Street at all hours of the day and of the evening becoming a subject of comment. There were those, however, who were favorably placed to watch the comedy—or ought we to call it farce now that criticism has grown so sensitive upon the point?—who were by no means enam-

ored of the spectacle. The fair protagonist was so authentic.

However, the gods were looking, as they are sometimes. And the manner in which they contrived to mark their attention was really rather quaint. They inserted a bee in Cheriton's cool and sagacious bonnet.

"My dear Caroline," said he, one morning when he paid a call, "do you know I have taken a fancy to have a copy of Grandmother Dorset to stick in the little gallery in Grosvenor Square."

"Humph!" said Caroline, ungraciously.

"Don't say 'humph,' my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, melodiously; "it makes you look so plain."

"I have never allowed that picture to leave my drawing-room," said she, "for public exhibition or on any other pretext, and I don't see why I should do so at this time of day."

"There is no need for it to leave your drawing-room," said Cheriton, persuasively. "A man can come here to copy it if you will grant him the use of the place of a morning."

"I don't see why," said Caroline, "my drawing-room should be turned into a painter's studio."

"It is quite a simple matter," Cheriton explained. "A curtain can be rigged up and drawn across the canvas, and you won't know it's there."

Caroline yielded with reluctance.

"There is a young fellow of the name of Lascelles," said Cheriton, "whom I believe to be quite competent to make a respectable copy."

"A Royal Academician?"

"God bless me, no! The young fellow is only a beginner."

"I fail to see why I should grant the use of my drawing-room," said Caroline, "to a person who is not a member of the Royal Academy. And what an inferior copy by some wretched dauber will profit you, I cannot imagine."

"I am afraid," said Cheriton, with the air of one imparting a state secret, "I am going Gainsborough mad. If I can't have Grandmother Dorset at present for Cheriton House, I intend to have something as near to her as I can get. And, in my opinion, this young fellow Lascelles is the very man to make a faithful copy of the peerless original. He has had the best possible training for color, and, like myself, he is a Gainsborough enthusiast."

Without further preface, James Lascelles found his way to Hill Street one fine spring morning. He was armed with the tools of his trade, and with a great piece of canvas some eighty-four inches by fifty.

Jim Lascelles was a cheery, healthy, young fellow, about six feet two, and undoubtedly a supremely attractive representative of the English nation. How a man of Cheriton's cool penetration, who rejoiced in such a sound working knowledge of things as they are, should have fallen so easily and so blindly into the trap that had been laid for him is one of those matters upon which only the most inconclusive speculations can avail us. Doubtless he thought that a

young fellow so obscure as Jim, who was as poor as a mouse, and in no way immodest in his ideas, could be trusted implicitly with such a trifling commission. And doubtless he could have been had those Persons Upstairs played the game. But of course they don't always; and a man as wise as Cheriton ought to have known it.

All that Cheriton condescended to know on this important and wide-reaching subject was that Jim Lascelles " hadn't a bob in the world," and that he was good to his mother. He was not even aware that the mother of Jim, by some obscure mode of reasoning peculiar to her kind, felt that Jim was bound to turn out a great genius. Nor was he aware that on that *naïf* pretext she had pinched and scraped in the most heroic manner to spare enough from her modest pittance to give Jim three years' training in Paris in the studio of the world-renowned Monsieur Gillet. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that Lord Cheriton had any special faith in Jim or in his genius. He merely believed that he could intrust a little commission with perfect safety, and with profit to both parties, to a modest, sound-hearted, pleasantly mediocre young fellow.

Now, at the hour Jim Lascelles made his first appearance in Hill Street, that is just about what he was. Sometimes, it is true, he would have occasional dreams of coming greatness. But he never mentioned them to anybody, because, in his own mind, he was convinced that they were due to having supped later than usual. He troubled very little about the future.

He worked on steadily, striving to pay his way; and if he never expected to see his "stuff" on the line in the long room at Burlington House, he did hope some time to sell it a little more easily, and to get better prices for it from the dealers.

If he could go once in three years to Kennington Oval to see Surrey play the Australians, or if he could afford a couple of tickets occasionally for the Chelsea Arts Club Fancy Ball at Covent Garden, or his funds were sufficient for him to take his mother to the dress-circle of a suburban theater to see a play that ended pleasantly, and he was always able to buy as much tobacco as he wanted, he didn't mind very much that he worked very hard to earn very little. He argued quite correctly that many chaps were worse off than Jim Lascelles. He had splendid health, and he had a splendid mother.

No sooner had John received Jim Lascelles on this memorable forenoon, and the mighty canvas that accompanied him, which was in the care of two stalwart sons of labor, than the fun really began. In the first place, it was only with infinite contrivance that it was got through the blue drawing-room door, which, fortunately for Jim—and dare we say for Cheriton?—was part and parcel of a spacious and lofty Georgian interior. All the same, some sacrifice of white paint was involved in the process, which was deemed a sacrilege by at least one witness to it.

However, our old friend John did not overawe Jim Lascelles as much as he had a right to expect to,

because Jim had been born and brought up at the Red House at Widdiford, and he went to quite a good school before the crash came.

"A shocking bad light," said Jim, surveying the aristocratic gloom of the blue drawing-room as though it belonged to him. "Better stick it there."

With considerable hauteur, John superintended the rearing of the unwieldy canvas in the place Jim Lascelles had indicated. It involved the moving of the sofa six yards to the left. To do this, in the opinion of John, almost required a special Act of Parliament. It was certainly necessary to get the authority of Mr. Marchbanks before it could be moved an inch. Jim, however, being a young fellow who liked his own way, and who generally managed to get it, cheerfully removed the sofa himself while John was seeking the permission of his chief. When that astonished functionary returned, the two stalwart sons of labor were performing their final duties. He had, therefore, to be content with a stern admonition as to where they put their feet while they fixed up the canvas.

Jim Lascelles was not given to unbridled enthusiasms, but the discovery of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough, seemed greatly to disturb him.

"Ye gods!" said Jim, "it is a crime to keep the heritage of the nation in a light like this." He turned to John, who held his chin in the air, the incarnation of outraged dignity. "I say," said he, "can't you draw those blinds up higher?"

"No, sir," said John, superciliously, "not without her ladyship's permission."

"Where is her ladyship?" said Jim. "I should like to see her."

"Her ladyship is *not* at home, sir," said John, with emphasis.

"Well," said the imperturbable James, "those blinds will undoubtedly have to go up higher."

And Jim Lascelles, doubtless to prove to all whom it might concern that he was in the habit of respecting his own opinion, walked up to the window, unloosed the cords, and hauled up the Venetian blinds to their uttermost. Various additional beams of the May sunshine rewarded his action.

"Now," said Jim, "perhaps we shall be able to get some sort of an idea of Gainsborough at his best."

We think it is open to doubt whether John had a feeling for art. At least he seemed to evince no desire to obtain an idea of Gainsborough at his best. For he merely turned his back upon Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, and incidentally upon Jim Lascelles, and proceeded in quite the grand manner to shepherd the two sons of labor into the street.

This feat accomplished, John made a formal complaint to his official superior.

"That painting man," said he, "goes on as if the place belonged to him. I don't know what her ladyship will say, I'm sure."

"John," said that pillar of the Whigs impressively, "if the education of the masses does not prove

the ruin of this country, Henry Marchbanks is not my name."

Miss Perry, in her second-best frock, the modest blue serge, descended the stairs.

"Has the painting man come yet?" she inquired.

"Yes, miss, he has," said John, with venom and with brevity.

"Do you think I might go in and peep at him?" she said in her ludicrous way. "I should so like to see a real painting man, painting a real picture with paints."

"If you obtain her ladyship's permission, I dare say, miss, you may do so," said Mr. Marchbanks, cautiously.

Miss Perry, however, as is the way of her sex, when her curiosity was fully aroused, was quite capable of displaying a mind of her own.

Miss Perry entered the blue drawing-room noiselessly. There was the painting man with his hands in his pockets. He was standing with his back to her, and he was entirely lost in contemplation of the masterpiece he had been commissioned to copy.

"Marvelous!" he could be heard to exclaim at little intervals under his breath, "marvelous!"

This examination of Gainsborough's masterpiece was terminated long before it otherwise would have been by the intervention of what can only be described as a positive crow of human delight.

"Why, it's Jim," said Miss Perry. "Jim Lascelles."

Jim Lascelles turned about with a look of wonder

upon his handsome countenance. At first he said not a word; and then he placed both hands upon the stalwart shoulders of Miss Perry and gave her a sound shaking of affectionate incredulity.

"It is the Goose Girl," said Jim. "You great overgrown thing."

Miss Perry gave what can only be described as a second crow of human pleasure.

"Why, Jim," said she, "you've got a mustache."

"The Goose Girl," cried Jim, "in the blessed old town of London."

"I've been in London three weeks," said Miss Perry, importantly.

"I've been in London three years," said Jim Lascelles, sadly. "What a great overgrown thing! You are taller than I am."

"Oh no," said Miss Perry; "I am only six feet."

Jim Lascelles declined to be convinced that Miss Perry was not more than six feet until they had stood back to back to take a measurement.

"You are an absolute what-do-you-call-'em!" said Jim. "Are you as fond of bread and jam and apples and old boots as you used to be? Or, let me see, was it Doggo who used to eat old boots in his youth?"

"I never ate old boots," said Miss Perry, with an air of conviction.

"Yes, I remember now," said Jim; "old boots and kitchen chairs were the only things you didn't eat. I've had many a licking because the Goose Girl was so fond of apples."

We are sorry to state that Miss Perry's lips suffered an unmistakable twitch.

"Have you ever tasted cream buns, Jim?" said she.

"No," said Jim; "we don't get those refinements at Balham. But tell me, how is the Muffin Girl, and the Polly Girl, and the Milly Girl, and Dickie and Charley, and all the rest of the barbarian horde? And what is the Goose Girl doing so far away from Slocum Magna? How has she found her way into this superlative neighborhood?" The eye of Jim Lascelles was arrested by Miss Perry's formal blue serge. "Governess, eh? How funny that the Goose Girl, with the brains of a bumble-bee, should be turned into a governess!"

"Oh no," said Miss Perry. "Didn't you know? I have come to live with Aunt Caroline."

"Aunt who?"

"Aunt Caroline," said Miss Perry.

"Then she must be one of the grand relations the Polly Girl used to boast about, that would never have nothing to do with the family of Slocum Magna."

We hope and trust that neither Aunt Caroline nor Ponto overheard Jim Lascelles; in fact, there is every reason to believe that they did not, because had they done so, it is our firm belief that this history would have been over almost as soon as it had begun. Yet this was the indubitable moment that Ponto and his mistress chose to make their entrance into the blue drawing-room. The instant Jim Lascelles caught sight of the headdress, the black silk, the ebony walk-

ing-stick, and the obese quadruped with gargoyle eyes, he checked his discourse and bowed in a very becoming manner.

"Aunt Caroline," said Miss Perry, with a presence of mind which really did her the highest credit, "this is Mr. Lascelles, who has come to paint the picture."

The old lady fixed her eyeglass with polar coolness.

"So I perceive," said she.

She looked Jim over as if he himself were a masterpiece by Gainsborough, and without making any comment she and Ponto withdrew from the blue drawing-room.

"A singularly disagreeable and ill-bred old woman," said Jim, who had the unfortunate habit of speaking his mind freely on all occasions.

"Aunt Caroline *is* rather reserved with strangers," said Miss Perry, "but she is a dear, really."

"She is not a dear at all," said Jim Lascelles, "and she's not a bit like one. She is just a proud, disagreeable, and unmannerly old woman."

Miss Perry looked genuinely concerned. For Jim Lascelles was angry, and she felt herself to be personally responsible for Aunt Caroline. However, there was one resource left for the hour of affliction.

"Would you like to see Tobias?" said she. "I've got him with me. I will fetch the sweet."

"What, is that ferret still alive?" said Jim. "My hat!" And then as Miss Perry moved to the drawing-room door, said James, "Oh no, you don't. Come back and sit there on the sofa if it is quite up to your weight, and I will show you how to paint a picture."

"What fun!" cried Miss Perry, returning obediently. "Do you remember teaching me how to draw cows?"

"Yes, I do," said Jim Lascelles. "You could draw as good a cow as anybody I ever saw, and that's the only thing you could do except sit a horse and handle a ferret and eat bread and jam."

Miss Perry sat in the middle of the sofa. By force of habit she assumed her most characteristic pose.

"There was also one other thing you could do," said Jim Lascelles. "When you were not actually engaged in eating bread and jam, you could always sit hours on end with your finger in your mouth thinking how you were going to eat it."

Jim took up his charcoal.

"Goose Girl," said he, "it's the oddest thing out. Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, had the habit of sticking her paw into her mouth. And I'll take my davy her thoughts were of bread and jam."

"Cream buns are so much nicer," said Miss Perry, sighing gently.

"You have grown a perfect Sybarite since you came to London," said Jim. "Nobody ever suspected the existence of cream buns at Slocum Magna."

Suddenly, and without any sort of warning, something flashed through the mind of Jim Lascelles; and this by some occult means conferred the air and the look upon him that gets people into encyclopedias.

"Don't move, Goose Girl," said he. "Do you know who has painted that hair of yours?"

"I don't think it has been painted," said Miss Perry.

"That is all you know," said Jim. "Your hair has been painted by the light of the morning."

Jim Lascelles laid down his charcoal and took up the brush that on a day was to make him famous. He dipped it in bright yellow pigment; and although, as all the world knows, the hair of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, is unmistakably auburn, Jim began by flinging a splotch of yellow upon the great canvas.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, with an expression of joy that made him seem preposterously fine to look at, "I have sometimes felt that if it should ever be my luck to happen upon a great subject, I might turn out a painter."

"Your mamma always said you would," said Miss Perry.

"And your papa always said you would marry an earl," said Jim Lascelles.

Quite suddenly the blue drawing-room vibrated with a note of triumph.

"Oh, Jim! I've almost forgotten to tell you about my lilac frock."

"Have you a lilac frock?"

"You remember the mauve that Muffin had?" said Miss Perry, breathlessly.

"After my time," said Jim Lascelles. "But I pity a mauve on the Ragamuffin."

"Muffin's mauve was perfect," said Miss Perry. "And my lilac is nearly as nice as Muffin's."

"Put it on to-morrow," said Jim. "I'll inspect

you in it, you great overgrown thing. Now, don't move the Goose Piece, you silly. The light of the morning strikes it featly. Really I doubt whether this yellow be bright enough."

"Jim," said Miss Perry, "to-morrow I will show you my new hat."

"Stick your paw in your mouth," said Jim. "And don't dare to take it out until you are told to. And keep the Goose Piece just where it is. Think of cream buns."

"They are awfully nice," said Miss Perry.

Jim Lascelles dabbed another fearsome splotch of yellow upon the great canvas.

"Monsieur Gillet would give his great French soul," said Jim, softly, "for the hair of the foolish Goose Girl whose soul is composed of cream buns. Ye Gods!"

Why James Lascelles should have been guilty of that irrelevant exclamation I cannot say. Perhaps it was that the young fellow fancied that he heard the first faint distant crackle of the immortal laughter. Well, well! we are but mortal, and who but the gods have made us so?

CHAPTER XI

MISS PERRY IS THE SOUL OF DISCRETION

THE next morning at ten o'clock, when Jim Lascelles appeared for the second time in Hill Street, he was received in the blue drawing-room by the lilac frock and its wonderful canopy. Jim gave back a step before the picture that was presented.

"My aunt!" said he.

"The frock is a sweet," said Miss Perry. "Isn't it? Muffin's——"

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "you are marvelous."

"I think the hat must flop a little too much," said Miss Perry, "in places. It makes people turn round to stare at it."

"Of course it does, you foolish person," said Jim, with little guffaws of rapture. "It is an absolute aboriginal runcible hat. How did you come by it? It seems to me there are deep minds in this."

"Lord Cheriton chose it," said Miss Perry.

"My noble patron and employer. It does him infinite credit. That hat is an achievement."

"Aunt Caroline doesn't like it," said Miss Perry. "Especially in church."

"Aunt Caroline is a Visigoth," said Jim. "Let us forget her. Sit there, you Goose, where you sat yes-

terday. And if you don't move and don't speak for an hour, you shall have a cream bun."

It was bribery, of course, on the part of Jim Lascelles, but Miss Perry made instant preparation to earn the promised guerdon.

"You are so marvelous," said Jim, "that poor painting chaps ought not to look at you. Oho! I begin to have light. I begin to see where that lilac arrangement and that incredible headpiece came from. By the way, Goose Girl, is it possible that Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, is one of your grand relations?"

"She is my great-grandmamma," said Miss Perry.

"She must be," said Jim. "What has old Dame Nature been doing, I wonder? Copying former successes. And old Sir President History, R.A., famous painter of genre, repeating himself like one o'clock."

Jim Lascelles began to sketch the incredible hat with great vigor and boldness.

"By all the gods of Monsieur Gillet," said Jim, vaingloriously, "they will want a rail to guard it at the Luxembourg."

Yet Jim was really a modest young fellow. Could it be that already a phial of the magic potion had been injected into the veins of that sane and amiable youth?

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "it is quite clear to me that if the Duchess was your great-grandmamma, Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., was my old great-granddad. Now, don't move the Goose Piece. She wear-eth a mar-vel-ous hat!" Jim's charcoal was

performing surprising antics. "Chin Piece quite still. Wonderful natural angle. Can you keep good if you take your paw out of your mouth?"

"I will try to," said Miss Perry, with perfect docility.

"We will risk it," said Jim. "Keep saying to yourself, 'Only thirty-five minutes more and I get a cream bun.'"

"Yes, Jim," said Miss Perry, with a remarkable air of intelligence.

"Paws down," said Jim. "Hold 'em thusly. Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said. No, and not the Whole of the White and Pink and Blue and Yellow Goose Piece neither."

Perhaps it is not strictly accurate to state that Jim dropped into poetry as he continued the study of his subject. But certainly he indulged in a kind of language which assumed lyrical form.

"Paws down," said Jim. "She approacheth her Mouth Piece upon pain of losing her Bun. Paw Pieces quite quiet. Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said."

The blue eyes of Miss Perry were open to their limit. They seemed to devour the slow-ticking clock upon the chimney-piece. At last virtue was able to claim its reward.

"Cream bun, please," drawled Miss Perry, in a manner that was really ludicrous.

"It can't possibly be an hour yet," said Jim.

"It is," said Miss Perry, with great conviction. "It is *honestly*."

"Very good," said Jim. "Young Man taketh Goose Girl's word of honor." He produced a neat-looking white paper packet from his coat pocket. "Goose Girl presenteth Paw Piece," said he, "to receive Diploma of Merit. A short interval for slight but well-deserved nourishment."

Miss Perry lost no time in divesting the packet of its trappings. I don't say positively that her satisfaction assumed an audible form when she beheld the seductive delicacy of its contents. But, at all events, she lost no time in taking a very large bite out of a bun of quite modest dimensions.

"Jim," said she, "it is *quite* as nice as the ones that come from Buszard's."

"It is their own brother," said Jim. "This comes from Buszard's."

"R-R-Really," said Miss Perry, with a doubtful roll of the letter R. "But those that Gobo brings me are larger."

"They grow more than one size at Buszard's," said Jim. "Gobo is a bit of a duke, I dare say."

"He *is* a duke," said Miss Perry.

"If I were a duke," said Jim, "I should bring you the large size. But as I am only Jim Lascelles who lives at Balham with his old mother, you will have to be content with the small ones."

It may have been that Miss Perry was a little disappointed, because the small ones only meant a bite and a little one. But she contrived to conceal her disappointment very successfully. Although

brought up in the country she had excellent breeding.

"Jim," said Miss Perry, "where is Balham?"

"Quite a ducal question," said Jim.

"Is it as far from London as London is from Slocum Magna?" said Miss Perry.

"I acquit you of *arrière pensée*," said Jim. "Here is Lord Cheriton. You had better ask him where Balham is."

That nobleman in resplendent morning attire entered with an air that was fatherly.

"Is it my privilege to make you known to one another?" said he, with an air of vast benevolence. "My ward, Miss Perry. Mr. Lascelles, the coming Gainsborough."

"Oh, I've known Jim——" Miss Perry began blurting, when it is grievous to have to inform the gentle reader that Jim Lascelles dealt her a stealthy but absolutely unmistakable kick on the shin in quite the old Widdiford manner.

"Can you tell me where Balham is?" Miss Perry inquired of Lord Cheriton with really wonderful presence of mind. But there was a real honest tear in her eyes; and tears are known to be an excellent old-fashioned specific for the wits.

"Certainly I can," said he, with courtly alacrity. "Balham is an outlying part of the vast metropolis. It is a most interesting place with many honorable associations."

"Jim," the luckless Miss Perry was beginning, but happily on this occasion Jim Lascelles had no need

to do more than show her his boot, while Cheriton's sense of hearing was by no means so acute as it might have been; "Mr. Lascelles," Miss Perry contrived to correct herself, "lives at Balham."

"Then we are able," said Cheriton, "to congratulate Mr. Lascelles and also to congratulate Balham. But tell me, Lascelles, why you live in an outlying part of the vast metropolis when the center calls you?"

"We live at Balham," said Jim, "my mother and I, because it is cheap and respectable."

"A satisfying combination," said Cheriton. "I trust the presence of my ward, Miss Perry, does not retard the progress of your artistic labors?"

"Quite the contrary, I assure you," said Jim, with excellent politeness.

"I am glad of that," said Cheriton. "But as you may have already discovered, Miss Perry has quite the feeling for art."

"Yes," said Jim, perhaps conventionally, "I am sure she has."

"It is a very remarkable case of heredity. You see, my dear Lascelles, Gainsborough painted her great-grandmamma."

"So I understand," said Jim, with great solemnity.

"It is a great pleasure to me, my dear Lascelles, that Miss Perry's taste in art is so sure. We go to the National Gallery together, hand in hand as it were, to admire the great Velasquez."

"He is a sweet," said Miss Perry.

"And, my dear Lascelles, we profoundly admire the great Rembrandt also."

"He is a sweet too," said Miss Perry.

"And, my dear Lascelles, together we share—Miss Perry and I—a slight distrust of the permanent merit of Joseph Wright of Derby. The fact is, Joseph Wright of Derby somehow fails to inspire our confidence. One can understand Joseph Wright of Sheffield perfectly well; or even perhaps—mind, I do not say positively—Joseph Wright of Nottingham; but I put it to you, Lascelles, can one accept Joseph Wright of Derby as belonging to all time?"

"I agree with you," said Jim. "Yet was there not once an immortal born at Burton-on-Trent?"

"I never heard that there was," said Cheriton, with an air of pained surprise. "And that is a matter upon which I am hardly open to conviction. By the way, Lascelles, which of England's luscious pastures had the glory of giving birth to your genius?"

As a preliminary measure Jim Lascelles showed Miss Perry his boot.

"I was born," said Jim, modestly, yet observing that the blue eyes of Miss Perry were adequately fixed on his boot, "at a little place called Widdiford, in the north of Devon."

"Yes, of course," said Cheriton, graciously; "I ought to have remembered, as your father and I were at school together. I remember distinctly that it was the opinion of the fourth form common room that the finest clotted cream and the finest strawberry jam in the world came from Widdiford."

" It is almost as nice at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, in spite of the covert threat that was still lurking in Jim's outstretched boot.

" Quite so," said Cheriton. " Ha, happy halcyon days of youth, when the cream was really clotted and the strawberries were really ripe! But I seem to remember that Widdiford is remarkable for something else."

Miss Perry was prepared to enlighten Lord Cheriton, but Jim's boot rose ferociously.

" Stick paw in Mouth Piece," Jim whispered truculently, " and merely think of cream buns."

" Widdiford," said Cheriton, " let me see. In what connection have I heard that charmingly poetic name? Ah, to be sure, I remember—Widdiford is the place at which they have not quite got the railway, don't you know. Miss Araminta, is not that the case? "

" Yes," said Miss Perry; " but it is only three miles away."

" And what is the proximity," said Cheriton, a little dubiously it is to be feared, " of Widdiford to Slocum Magna? "

" The best part of two miles," said Jim Lascelles, boldly taking the bull by the horns. " Quite a coincidence, isn't it, that we should have lived at the Red House at Widdiford, and that Miss Perry's papa should have lived at the Parsonage, at Slocum Magna? In fact, I seem to remember Miss Perry or one of her sisters as quite a tot of a girl sitting as good as pie in the vicarage pew."

It was here that Jim's boot did wonders. Miss Perry was simply besieged by voices from the upper atmosphere beseeching her to give the whole thing away completely. She refrained, however. Her respect for Jim's boot enabled her to continue sitting as good as pie.

That being the case, let us offer this original piece of observation for what it is worth. Cream buns are remarkably efficient in some situations, while an uncompromising right boot is equally efficient in others. To Jim Lascelles belongs the credit of having assimilated early in life this excellent truth.

Cheriton turned to see what progress Jim Lascelles had made with his labors.

"Very good progress, Lascelles," said he. Yet something appeared to trouble my lord. "Upon my word," said he, "either my eyesight betrays me or the color of your girl's hair is yellow."

"Is it?" said Jim Lascelles, innocently. "Yes, so it is, as yellow as the light of the morning."

"The duchess's hair is auburn, unmistakably."

"Why, yes," said Jim; "but really, don't you think yellow will be quite as successful?"

Cheriton gazed at Jim Lascelles in profound astonishment.

"My dear fellow," said he, "I hope you understand what you are commissioned to do. You are commissioned to make a precise and exact copy of Gainsborough's Duchess of Dorset for Cheriton House, not to perpetrate a *tour de force* of your own. Upon my word, Lascelles, that hair is really too

much. And the set of the hat, as far as one may judge at present, certainly differs from the original. I am sorry to say so, Lascelles, but really I think in the interests of all parties it would be well if you started again."

Jim put his hands in his pockets. Upon his handsome countenance was a very whimsical if somewhat dubious expression.

"Lord Cheriton," said he, solemnly, "the truth is, if I could have afforded to lose a cool hundred pounds, which I don't mind saying is more than the whole of what I made last year, I should not have accepted this commission. As I have accepted it I shall do my best; and if the results are not satisfactory I shall not look for remuneration."

"Well, Lascelles," said his patron, "that is a straightforward proposition. I dare say it is this confounded French method of looking at things that has misled you so hopelessly. 'Pon my word, I never saw such hair, and Gillet never saw such hair either. It is enough to make Gainsborough turn in his grave. It is most providential that I happened to look in. Take a fresh piece of canvas and start again."

Jim Lascelles laid his head to one side with a continuance of his whimsical and dubious air. There was no doubt that the yellow was extremely bold and that the hair of the duchess was auburn.

Yet what of the cause of the mischief? There she sat on the sofa in her favorite pose, blissfully unconscious of the trouble she had wrought, for there could be no doubt whatever that her thoughts were

of cream buns. And further, it seemed to Jim Lascelles that there could be no doubt either that her hair had been painted by the light of the morning. Cheriton, however, was too much preoccupied with the duchess to observe that fact.

"My dear Miss Araminta," said he, "as this is a really fine morning, and this is really the month of May, let us stroll into the park and watch young England performing maritime feats on the Serpentine. And after luncheon, if the weather keeps fine, we will go to the circus."

"What fun!" said Miss Perry.

CHAPTER XII

JIM LASCELLES TAKES A DECISIVE STEP

CAROLINE CREWKERNE'S "Wednesdays" had not been so thronged for many years past. They had been in their heyday twenty years earlier in the world's history, when the spacious mansion in Hill Street was the fount of the most malicious gossip to be obtained in London. But the passing of the years had bereft Caroline of something of her vigor and of even more of her *savoir faire*. She had grown difficult and rather out of date.

However, it had recently been decreed in the interests of human nature that Caroline Crewkerne should come into vogue again. People were to be seen at her "Wednesdays" who had not been seen there for years.

There was George Betterton for one. And the worldly wise, of course, were very quick to account for his presence, and to turn it to pleasure and profit. Cheriton and he were both popular men; and about the third week in May two to one against George and three to one against Cheriton were taken and offered.

"Cheriton is the prettier sparrer," said students of form, "but Gobo, of course, has the weight."

"I assure you, my dear," said a decidedly influential section of the public, "the creature is a perfect

simpleton. I assure you she couldn't say 'Bo!' to a goose. It is inconceivable that two men as old as they are and in their position should make themselves so supremely ridiculous. And both of them old enough to be her father."

"Caroline Crewkerne is behind it all," said the philosophical. "Her hand has lost nothing of its cunning. Really it is odious to aid and abet them to make such an exhibition of themselves."

It is regrettable, all the same, to have to state that the exhibition was enjoyed hugely. And when the *Morning Post* announced that on a certain evening the Countess of Crewkerne would give a dance for Miss Perry, there was some little competition to receive a card.

Cards were liberally dispensed, but when they came to hand many persons of the quieter and less ostentatious sort found that a little fly had crept into the ointment. "Fancy dress" was to be seen written at the top in a style of caligraphy not unworthy of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies. Miss Burden had been commanded to do this at the eleventh hour.

"That man Cheriton is responsible for this," complained those who desired neither the expense nor the inconvenience of habiting themselves in the garb of another age, "because he thinks he looks well in breeches."

That may have been partly the reason; but in justice to Cheriton it is only right to state that, unless he had found a weightier pretext to advance,

Caroline Crewkerne would never have assented to this somewhat eccentric condition. Indeed, it was only after a heated argument between them that Cheriton contrived to get his way.

" You must always be flamboyant and theatrical," grunted Caroline, " at every opportunity. All the world knows you look well in breeches."

" I protest, my dear Caroline," said the mellifluous Cheriton; " it is merely my desire to put another plume in your helmet. The creature will look ravishing as Araminta, Duchess of Dorset. Pélissier shall come this afternoon to copy the picture *de haut en bas*."

" It has been copied once already."

" Ah, no! It supplied an idea or two merely. When you see it in every detail precisely as Gainsborough saw it, you will observe the difference."

" People must be as sick of the picture as I am by this time."

" Nonsense! They are only just beginning to realize that you've got a picture."

Let it not be thought an injustice to Cheriton if one other motive is advanced for his insistence upon a somewhat singular course. When the cards of invitation had been duly issued he rather let the cat out of his bag.

" Of course, Caroline, you would be obstinate," said he, " and have your own way about that fellow George Betterton, but you know as well as I do that in any kind of fancy clothes he looks like a boa-constrictor."

At first Cheriton professed himself unable to decide whether he should appear as Charles II. or as John Wesley. In the end, however, he decided in favor of the former. Miss Burden had not been so excited for years. The subject filled her thoughts day and night for a whole week after the momentous decision was taken. She then submitted one day to his lordship at luncheon a peculiarly difficult problem.

"Not a problem at all," said he. "Simplest thing in the world, my dear lady. There is only one possible person you can go as."

"I had been thinking of Mary Queen of Scots," said Miss Burden, hardly daring to hope that Lord Cheriton would give his sanction.

"Mary Queen of who!" snarled Caroline.

"No, my dear Miss Burden," said the eminent authority, "the only possible person you can go as is Katharine of Aragon."

"Nonsense, Cheriton!" said Caroline. "I shall not permit Burden to appear in any such character. A Jane Austen spinster will be far more appropriate and far less expensive."

"My dear Caroline," said Cheriton, "how it would help everybody if you did not insist on airing your views upon matters of art! Do you wish Miss Burden to forfeit entirely her natural distinction?"

Miss Burden blushed most becomingly at his lordship's remark.

"I was not aware that she had any," said the ruthless Caroline.

"Upon my word, Caroline, even I begin to despair

of you. I assure you Miss Burden is quite one of the most distinguished-looking women of my acquaintance."

Miss Burden looked almost as startled as a fawn. Cheriton had never seen her display so much color as when he made her a little bow to attest his *bona fides*. It was rather a pity that his smile unconsciously resembled that of a satyr; not, however, that it really mattered, for although the ever-observant Caroline duly noted it Miss Burden did not.

"It is twenty-five minutes past two, Lord Cheriton," said Miss Perry, putting a sugar-plum in her mouth, "and you have promised to take me to the circus."

"Cheriton," said the old lady, "I forbid you to do anything of the kind. To spend three afternoons a week at a circus is outrageous."

"They are so educational," said Cheriton. "Develop the mind. Show how intelligence can be inculcated into the most unlikely things. Horses good at arithmetic, dogs playing whist, cats indulging in spiritualism. Very educational indeed. Clown imitating monkey in lifelike manner. Illustration of the origin of species. One more sugar-plum, my dear Miss Araminta, and then Marchbanks will summon a taximeter, if possible, with a tonneau painted pink."

"Gobo is going to take me to the Horse Show tomorrow," Miss Perry announced.

"Who, pray, is Gobo?" Aunt Caroline and Lord Cheriton demanded in one breath.

"He asked me to call him Gobo," said Miss Perry,

helping herself calmly to sugar-plums, "and I asked him to call me Goose."

Cheriton's countenance was unmistakably a study. The same might be said of that of Aunt Caroline.

"My dear young lady," said Cheriton, "this cannot be. One of the most dangerous men in London. Really, Caroline, you must forbid that old ruffian the house. As for the Horse Show to-morrow, it is clearly out of the question."

"I promised Gobo," said Miss Perry, "and I don't like to break a promise; do you?"

"My dear young lady, you are much too young and inexperienced to make a promise, let alone to keep one. I speak as I feel sure your papa would do were he in my place, and as I know I should do were I in the place of your papa. Your aunt is quite of that opinion; I speak for her also. You must not call that man Gobo, he must not call you Goose, and as for the Horse Show, it is out of the question."

"But everybody calls me Goose," said Miss Perry, "because I am *rather* a silly."

"Caroline," said Cheriton, with much gravity, "if you will take the advice of your oldest friend you will forbid that man the house. My dear Miss Araminta, let us try to obliterate a very disagreeable impression by spending a quietly educational afternoon at the circus."

When on the morning of the great day of the fancy ball Miss Perry entered the presence of Jim Lascelles as the faithful embodiment, down to the minutest particular, of Gainsborough's masterpiece,

that assiduous young fellow was seized with despair. It took the form of a gasp.

" Goose Girl," said he, " I shall have to give up coming here. I paint you all the morning, I think of you all the afternoon and evening, and I dream of you all night. You know you have rather knocked a hole in my little world."

" There will be ices to-night," said Miss Perry. " Lord Cheriton *almost* thinks pink ices are nicest."

" Confound Lord Cheriton," said Jim, with unpardonable bluntness, " and confound pink ices! "

" I thought I would just put on my new frock," said Miss Perry, " to see if you think it is as nice as you think the lilac is."

" I have no thoughts at all this morning," said Jim Lascelles, " about your new frock or about anything else. My mind is a chaos, my wretched brain goes round and round, and what do you suppose it is because of? "

" I don't know," said Miss Perry.

" It is because of you," said Jim Lascelles. " Look at that canvas you've ruined. Yellow hair—Gainsborough hat—lilac frock—full-fledged cream bun appearance. You will lose me my commission, which means a cool hundred pounds out of my pocket, and my mamma has denied herself common necessaries to pay for my education. Goose Girl," Jim Lascelles concluded a little hoarsely, " I am growing afraid of you. You are a sorceress. Something tells me that you will be my ruin."

"I wish you had seen Muffin's mauve," said Miss Perry, who showed very little concern for Jim's ruin.

"I have not the least desire to see Muffin's mauve," said Jim Lascelles. "In fact, I thank the God who looks after poor painters—if there is such a Deity, which I take leave to doubt—that I have not seen it. But I intend to ask you this question: What right have you, Goose Girl, to grow so extravagantly perfect, to get yourself up in this ravishing and entrancing manner, and then to come to ask a poor wight of a painting chap, who is daubing away for dear bread and butter, whether he thinks your new frock is as nice as the lilac was?"

"Muffin's mauve——" said Miss Perry.

"Answer me," said Jim, sternly. "You can't. You are a sorceress. You are a weaver of spells. Well, it so happens that I am susceptible to them. I am going to take a decisive step. Goose Girl, it is my intention to kiss you."

Without further preface or ado Jim Lascelles stepped towards Miss Perry with extended arms and eyes of menace. He hugged her literally, new frock and all, in the open light of the morning; and further, he gave her one of the most resounding busses that was ever heard in that dignified apartment.

"Get rid of that if you are able," said he, brazenly. "And now sit there, as good as pie, while I put that new gown upon canvas."

Miss Perry did as she was told in a manner that rather implied that she approved decidedly of the whole proceedings.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, attacking the canvas, "you will either make me or mar me. Sometimes I feel it might be the former, but more often I am convinced it will be the latter."

"Muffin's mauve cost a lot of money," said Miss Perry.

"Paws down," said Jim. "The question now for gods and men is, can that hair and that frock live together?"

Jim took up a little looking-glass and turned his back upon the canvas. He sighed with relief.

"Yes, they can by a miracle," said he. "And yet they out-Gillet Gillet."

"What will you be to-night, Jim?" asked Miss Perry.

"Achilles, sulking in my tent."

"Where will you put your tent?" said Miss Perry. "One can't dance in a tent. And what will you do when you are sulky?"

"Gnash my teeth and curse my luck."

"I will dance with you twice if you would like me to," said Miss Perry with charming friendliness.

"I shall not be there," said Jim, whose studied unconcern was rather a failure.

"Not be there!" said Miss Perry, with consternation.

"Aunt Caroline has not axed me."

It was some kind of solace to Jim Lascelles that dismay and incredulity contended upon the usually calm and unruffled countenance of Miss Perry.

"Miss Burden has forgotten you," said she. "I must speak to her."

Miss Perry rose for that purpose.

"Sit down, you Goose," Jim commanded her. "Don't speak a word about it to anybody, unless you want to get me sacked from the house. I am here on sufferance, a poor painting chap, copying a picture to get bread and cheese; and this ball to-night is being given by the Countess of Crewkerne, for her niece Miss Perry."

"But, Jim——"

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "keep Mouth Piece immovable. Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said. Think of cream buns."

"But, Jim——" said Miss Perry.

CHAPTER XIII

HIGH REVEL IS HELD IN HILL STREET

ALL the same, Miss Perry did not dance twice with Jim Lascelles that evening. For Jim took his mother to the Theatre Royal, at Brixton, to witness a performance of that excellent old-world comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer."

He did not appear to enjoy it much. He hardly laughed once, and his mother remarked it.

"What is the matter, my son?" said she. It ought to be stated that Jim's mother was absurdly young to occupy the maternal relation to a great hulking fellow like Jim.

"There is a ridiculous girl in my head," said he, "who is above me in station."

"That Goose?" said Jim's mother, a little contemptuously, it is to be feared.

"Yes, Señora," said Jim. "She is turning my brain rather badly."

Not unnaturally Jim's mother was amused that Jim should be so serious.

"If only I had enough money to buy back the Red House at Widdiford," sighed Jim, "I believe I could cut out them all."

"She was never able to resist the orchard, and the

south wall, and the strawberry-beds," Mrs. Lascelles agreed.

"I never saw such a creature," said Jim. "Those lilac frocks and those Gainsborough hats are maddening."

"Well, laddie," said Jim's mother, "you must paint her and make her and yourself famous."

"She is famous already," said Jim. "Worse luck. She is a nine days' wonder in Mayfair, and certain to marry a duke."

"That Goose!" said Jim's mother.

"Yes," said Jim; "it sounds ridiculous, but it is perfectly true."

"Well, my son," said Jim's mother, who believed profoundly in her offspring, "just paint her and see what comes of it."

While Jim Lascelles lay that night with his head on his arm, dreaming of the Goose Girl, high revel was held at the house of Caroline Crewkerne, in Hill Street, W. All ages and both sexes were gathered in the garb of their ancestors in the spacious suite of rooms on the second floor. From the moment that the first seductive strains were put forth by Herr Blaum's Green Viennese Band, and his Excellency the Illyrian Ambassador, in the guise of Henri Quatre or the Duke of Buckingham—nobody was quite sure which—accompanied by Diana of Ephesus, a bread-and-butter miss who looked much too young to be a duchess, went up the carpetless blue drawing-room, which seemed at least three times the size it did on ordinary occasions, as indeed was the case, there was

no doubt that Caroline Crewkerne was going to have a great success.

It is not easy to know whether Red Cross Knights, Cardinal Richelieus, Catherines de' Medici, and those kinds of people are susceptible of thrills; but there was one unmistakably when George Betterton, in the character of a Gentleman of the Georgian Era, took the floor with Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough, upon his arm.

The less responsible spirits directed their gaze to Charles II. The Merry Monarch was engaged in amiable converse with his hostess, who, habited in an Indian shawl, the gift of her Sovereign, and a jeweled turban presented to her by the Shah of Persia during his last visit to this country, together with the insignia of the Spotted Parrot duly displayed round her neck, made her, in the opinion of many, a very tolerable representation of a heathen deity. As a Gentleman of the Georgian Era and Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough, came down the room in a somewhat inharmonious manner, owing to the decidedly original ideas of the former in regard to the art he was practicing, the amiable and agreeably cultivated voice of Charles II. soared easily above the strains of the waltz and the frou-frou of the dancers.

"Yes," said that monarch, "the Georgian Era is sufficiently obvious; but can anybody tell me what has happened to the Gentleman?"

The Georgian Era went its victorious way however, gobbling decidedly, perspiring freely, holding

Gainsborough's Duchess in a grip of iron, and slowly but surely trampling down all opposition with the greatest determination. When, with coxcomb ensanguined, but with a solemn gobble of triumph, he came back whence he started, a slight but well-defined murmur of applause was to be heard on every hand.

"Georgian Era wins in a canter," one of the knowing fraternity could be heard to proclaim. "Evens on Gobo against the field."

"Duchess," said the Georgian Era, with a bow to his fair partner, who looked as cool as a cucumber, "you deserve an ice."

"Yes," said Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, with grave alacrity, "a *pink* one, please."

"Bad form," said the Second Charles; "decidedly a breach of manners to address her as duchess in the circumstances. But what can one expect of the Georgian Era!"

The Merry Monarch, with the unmistakable air of the master of the ceremonies, as indeed he was, proceeded to lead out Katharine of Aragon, who was seen to great advantage, such was her natural distinction, and who was that ill-fated queen to the manner born.

"Humph!" said the Heathen Deity. "For a born fool she dances very well."

The Second Charles danced like a rather elderly angel with wings.

The young people also were enjoying themselves. Eligible young men, and not a single one of the other

kind had gained admittance, had each his dance with the fair Araminta, or the fair Daphne, or the fair Evadne, or the fair Sweet Nell of Old Drury. Of course Gainsborough's masterpiece really brooked no rival, except the great canvas in the left-hand corner, which, in the full glare of the electric lights, seemed to do her best to dispute the supremacy of her youthful descendant.

"Yellow hair knocks spots off the auburn," said an Eldest Son to the Lynx-Eyed Dowager to whose apron he was very carefully tied.

"A matter of taste," was the rejoinder. "Yellow is never a safe color. It is well known that it means doubtful antecedents. They are beginning the lancers. Go, Pet, and find Mary."

Pet, who was six feet five, and had leave from Knightsbridge Barracks until five a.m., claimed the Watteau Shepherdess, a real little piece of Dresden China, who had forty-six thousand in land and thirty-six thousand in consols, and would have more when Uncle William permanently retired from the Cavalry; and who was perfectly willing to marry Pet or any one else if her mamma only gave her permission to do so.

Charles II. sat out the supper dance with the fair Araminta.

"Miss Goose," said the sagacious monarch, "never dance the dance before supper if you can possibly avoid it. You will live longer, you will be able to do ampler justice to whatever fare may be forthcoming, you will also be able to get in before the

squash; and if the quails run short, as is sometimes the case, it won't matter so much as it otherwise might do."

As far as the Merry Monarch was concerned, however, the precautions against the squash and the possibility of the quails running short were wholly superfluous. The pleasantest corner of the best-situated table had been reserved for him hours before, and all his favorite delicacies had been duly earmarked.

"Miss Goose," said the Merry Monarch, "have you had an ice yet?"

"I have had *seven*," said Araminta, Duchess of Dorset.

"*Pink* ones?" asked the Second Charles.

"Five were pink," said the Duchess, "one was yellow, and one was green. But I think that *pink* ones are *almost* the nicest."

"I concur," said the Second Charles.

After supper, before dancing was resumed, some incautious person, after gazing upon Gainsborough's masterpiece and subjecting it to some admiring if unlearned remarks, pulled aside the crimson curtain which hid from view Jim Lascelles' half-finished copy.

"Oho!" said the incautious one in a loud voice, "what have we here? To be sure, a Sargent in the making! Only Sargent could paint that hair."

The attention of others was attracted.

"I should say it is a Whistler," said a second critic.

"A Sargent decidedly," said a third. "Only he could paint that hair."

"It is high art, I dare say," said a fourth, "but isn't it rather extravagant?"

"If Gillet were in London," said critic the fifth, who had more instruction than all the others put together, "I should say it was Gillet. As he is not, it might be described as the work of a not unskillful disciple."

Cheriton stood listening.

"It is the work of a young chap named Lascelles," said he; "the coming man, I'm told."

Nobody had told Cheriton that Jim Lascelles was the coming man, and not for a moment did he believe that he was; but he was a member of that useful and considerable body which derives a kind of factitious importance from the making of imposing statements. He felt that it reacted upon his own status to announce that a young chap named Lascelles was the coming man when not a soul had heard of the young chap in question.

"I must remember the name," said a broad-jowled marquis from Yorkshire, who had come up in time to hear Cheriton's statement, and who greatly preferred to accept the judgment of others in the fine arts rather than exercise his own. "I should like him to paint Priscilla."

"The very man to paint Priscilla," said Cheriton, with conviction. And this, be it written to Cheriton's credit, was genuine good nature.

"What is the subject?" said the first critic.

"Why, can't you see?" said a chorus. "It is Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough."

"Which of 'em?"

"The yellow-haired one, of course."

Cheriton screwed his glass in his eye. He had been the first to detect that the color of the hair was yellow, and yet for some strange reason the solution of the mystery had not until that moment presented itself to him.

"What damned impertinence!" said he.

"Anybody been treading on *your* corns, Cheriton?" asked several persons.

"Not exactly. But, do you know, I commissioned that fellow Lascelles to make a copy of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, for Cheriton House."

"And he copies the wrong Araminta!" came a shout of laughter. There was really no need to shout, but immediately after supper that is the sort of thing that happens sometimes. "A good judge too."

"Gross impertinence. I think I shall be quite justified in repudiating the whole transaction."

"Quite, Cheriton," said the marquis, with a very obvious wink at the company and preparing to jest in the somewhat formidable Yorkshire manner. "But it is easily explained. Young fellow got a little mixed between Gainsborough's Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, and Nature's Araminta, Duchess of Brancaster. Very natural mistake—what?"

The arrival upon the scene of the Georgian Era and the Heathen Deity, the latter walking quite

nimbly with very little aid from her stick, set the circle of art critics in further uproar.

"Who pulled aside the curtain?" demanded the mistress of the house. "Cheriton, I suspect you."

"It is my picture, anyhow," said Cheriton, coolly, although he felt the game was rather going against him.

"It is not at all clear to my mind that it is your picture," said the sharp-witted Caroline, to the delight of everybody. "You send a man to copy my Gainsborough, and he copies my niece."

"A very natural error," said the marquis, "as we have just explained to Cheriton."

The Georgian Era was seen to grow uneasy. He began to fumble in his Georgian costume. Obviously he was not quite sure where the pockets were. At last, however, he was able to produce a pair of spectacles which he proceeded to adjust.

"Very good likeness," said he, heavily. "Caroline, when the picture is finished I should like to purchase it for the Cheadle Collection."

A salvo of laughter greeted this speech, but to laughter the speaker was constitutionally oblivious.

"The picture is not Caroline's, my dear George," said Cheriton. "The young fellow is painting it on my commission."

"Excellent likeness," said George, tenaciously. "I shall make you a fair offer, Cheriton, for the Cheadle Collection."

"I am sorry, my dear George, for the sake of the

Cheadle Collection," said Cheriton, amiably; "but that picture is not for sale."

"You are quite right, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne; "the picture is not for sale. I gave permission for a copy to be made of my Gainsborough, not of my niece."

"It appears to be a question of copyright," said a wit.

"I hold the copyright in both at present," said Caroline, in an exceedingly grim manner.

The strains of the dance began to float through the room. The younger section of the company had again taken their partners; a brace of royalties had arrived, yet in spite of that jest and counter-jest were in the air.

"Cheriton was never in it from the start," said the marquis, "if you want my candid opinion."

"The luckier he," said the first critic. "What does any man want with a girl who hasn't a sou, a country parson's daughter?"

"Healthy, I should say," said critic the second. "Comes of a good stock on the mother's side."

"Ye-es," said a third. "Useful."

"Finest-looking girl in England," said a fourth.

"They can both afford to marry her," said the marquis, "and I will lay the odds that the better man of the two does."

"Cheriton gets her in that event."

"Gobo for a monkey."

All the time, however, in Another Place, the Master of the Revels—but, after all, that is no concern of ours.

CHAPTER XIV

UNGENTLEMANLIKE BEHAVIOR OF JIM LASCELLES

JIM LASCELLES continued his labors. He arrived at Hill Street each morning at ten, and worked with diligence until two p.m. Urged by the forces within him, and sustained by the injudicious counsel of his mother, he devoted his powers to the yellow hair, in spite of the fact that by the terms of his commission it was his duty to copy the auburn.

About three days after the dance he was interrupted one morning by Lord Cheriton. Jim was feeling rather depressed. For one thing his conscience smote him. He had deliberately risked the loss of a sum of money which he could not afford to lose; and further, it was most likely that he was about to offer an affront to his only patron. The more work he put into the picture, the more marked became the difference between it and the original. Again, and this perhaps was an equally solid reason for his depression, this morning the Goose Girl had forsaken him. She had gone for a ride in the park with her duke.

Doubtless Cheriton was sharing Jim's depression. At least, when he entered the drawing-room to inspect the labors of his *protégé*, a countenance which, as a general rule, made a point of exhibiting a scrupulous amiability, was clouded over.

Cheriton's scrutiny of Jim's labors was long and particular.

"I invite you to be frank with me, Lascelles," said he. "Is this a copy of the Dorset, or is it a portrait of a living person?"

By nature Jim was a simple and ingenuous fellow. But really his present predicament was so awkward that he did not know what reply to make.

"Some of it is Gainsborough," said Jim, lamely, "and some of it, I am afraid, is nature."

"I am sorry to say, my dear Lascelles," said Cheriton, judicially, "that I cannot accept that as an adequate answer to a straightforward question."

"No, it is not a very good answer," Jim agreed.

Suddenly his jaw dropped and he burst into a queer laugh.

"The fact is, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, "I am in a hole."

Cheriton regarded Jim in a highly critical manner.

"Yes, Lascelles," said he, slowly. "I think you are."

"A hole," Jim repeated with additional emphasis, as if he desired to gain confidence from a frank statement of his trouble.

Jim's odd face seemed to appeal for a little sympathy, but not a suggestion of it was forthcoming.

"What can a fellow do?" said Jim, desperately. "She will come and sit here on that sofa in a better light than the duchess. The sun of the morning will

shine upon her; and when Nature comes to handle pink and white and blue and yellow she has a greater magic than ever Gainsborough had."

Cheriton shook his head with magisterial solemnity.

"Lascelles," said he, "you have a very weak case. And I feel bound to say that the manner in which you present it does not, in my opinion, make it stronger."

"I expect not," said Jim, ruefully. "But dash it all, what is a fellow to do if she will come and sit on that sofa and pose like Romney's Emma?"

"His duty is absolutely clear to my mind, and I think it is simple. He should order the intruder out of the room."

"Oh yes, I know," said Jim, "that is what a really strong chap would do." Jim gave a groan. "I know that is what a Velasquez or a Rembrandt would have done. And he would have cursed her like fury for sitting there at all."

"Yes, I think so," said the mellifluous Cheriton. "Rembrandt especially. In my opinion, Rembrandt would have shaken his fist at her."

"That is the worst of being a mediocrity," said Jim, gloomily. "It takes a chap with enormous character to do these things."

"I am afraid, Lascelles, the plea of mediocrity will do nothing for you. If anything, it weakens your case. Personally, if I were advising you I should say either put in a plea of consummate genius or do not put in a plea at all."

"I am not such a fool as to believe that I'm a genius," said Jim, with excellent frankness.

"I am not such a fool as to believe you are either," said Cheriton, with a frankness that was equally excellent. "And therefore, examining your conduct with all the leniency the circumstances will permit, I am unable to find any palliation for it. I fear my old friend Lady Crewkerne is much annoyed—forgive my plainness, Lascelles, but I feel it to be necessary—by your intrepidity in copying her niece instead of her Gainsborough; and I, as an old friend of the house, feel bound to share her disapproval."

"Rub it in, Lord Cheriton," said Jim.

He stuck his hands in his pockets and began to whistle softly with an air of supreme discomfiture.

"Yes, Lascelles, I intend to do so. In fact, I find it difficult to say all that I should like to do upon the subject, without actually saying more than one who was at school with your father would feel it desirable to say to a young man who has his own way to make in the world."

"Say just as much as you like," said Jim. "I know I have made an ass of myself. And of course I haven't a leg to stand on, really. And I expect the old cat will have me on the carpet too."

Cheriton dropped his eyeglass with an air of dignified agitation.

"I beg your pardon, Lascelles," said he. "To whom do you refer?"

"To that damned old woman!" said Jim Lascelles, with an unabashed air.

"Can it be possible that you refer to Caroline Crewkerne, my oldest friend?"

"I mean the aunt of Nature's immortal work," said Jim, coolly. "I really can't help it; I feel that I must curse somebody this morning. And as she is bound to curse me, I don't see why I shouldn't curse her."

"Your habit of explanation, Lascelles, is decidedly unfortunate."

"Well, tell me the worst, Lord Cheriton. I suppose you withdraw your offer; and I am to be bundled out neck and crop with my canvas and forbidden to come here again?"

"I certainly withdraw my offer. In regard to prohibition of the house that, of course, rests entirely with my old friend, of whom you have spoken in a singularly disrespectful—and shall I say ungentlemanlike?—manner."

"I couldn't help it," said Jim, humbly. "It has done me good to say it. But, of course, I'm in the wrong altogether."

"You are, undoubtedly. To my mind, you are more in the wrong than one could have judged possible for a young man of your character, upbringing, and attainments to be."

"If a confounded girl," said Jim, "will make a practice of coming into this room continually to ask you what your opinion is of her hat and her frock, and whether you have ever tasted cream buns and pink ices, and whether you think Muffin's mauve was as nice as her lilac is——"

"My dear Lascelles," interrupted Cheriton, "your habit of explanation is really most unfortunate."

"Well, kick me out and my canvas too," said Jim, desperately, "and have done with it."

Jim Lascelles, like the rash and hasty fellow that he was, feeling himself to be irretrievably disgraced and that he had forfeited forever the respect and good-will of his only patron, proceeded to pack up his brushes and his pigments.

"The former part of your suggestion, Lascelles, is much the simpler matter of the two. But in the matter of the half-finished canvas I foresee difficulty."

"You have repudiated it, haven't you?" said Jim, rather fiercely.

"Unquestionably as a copy of the Dorset. But all the same, I do not think it can be permitted to leave this house."

"Why not, Lord Cheriton?"

"It is an unauthorized portrait of my ward, Miss Perry, who at present is *in statu pupillari*."

"Ye-es," said Jim, dubiously, "I suppose it is. All the same, it is rather rough on a chap. I have put a lot of work into that picture."

"I can see you have, Lascelles."

"And of course," said Jim, injudiciously, "I should like to put a lot more work into it. It is such a fine subject."

"The subject is much too fine, Lascelles, if I may venture an opinion. My advice to you is, burn the canvas and forget that it ever existed."

No pity was taken on Jim's blank consternation.

"Burn it!" cried Jim, aghast.

"I am afraid if you don't, my dear Lascelles, Lady Crewkerne will."

"But she has no right——" said Jim, fiercely.

"I am afraid, my dear fellow, her right is not to be contested. In my view, this half-finished canvas is much more her property than it is yours."

"Well," said Jim, apprehensively, "I shall remove it at once to my studio."

Cheriton had dropped his little bombshell. The gyrations of his vicitim, whom he had fully alarmed, seemed to afford him a great deal of pleasure.

"Let us take it a little easier, my dear fellow," said he. "I agree with you that it would be a great pity to destroy such an extremely promising work of art. Let us seek for an alternative."

"The only alternative I can see," said Jim, "is that I should remove it at once."

"In its half-finished state? That would be a pity."

"Well, I don't mean it to be burnt if I can help it," said Jim.

During the pause which followed Jim looked highly perplexed, not a little disconcerted, and also somewhat belligerent.

"I have a suggestion to make to you, Lascelles," said his patron. "In the circumstances I think it is quite the most you can hope for."

"I shall be happy to consider it, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, with a rueful smile.

"In the first place, it seems to me that the best

thing I can do is to get the permission of Lady Crewkerne for you to finish the portrait of her niece. Now, I warn you it may not be easy. As I think you have conjectured, she is a difficult member of a most difficult sex. But I am only prepared to do this upon one definite condition."

"What is it?" asked Jim, in a tone that was not very hopeful.

"The condition must be this, Lascelles," said Cheriton, with a very businesslike air. "As you have treated me so abominably—I regret exceedingly that candor compels me to use the term—if I obtain permission for you to complete your portrait of Miss Perry, I shall insist upon being allowed to purchase it upon my own terms."

"Yes," said Jim, "that is only fair."

It seemed to him that things were taking a much more favorable course than he could have hoped for.

"If I can obtain permission for you, Lascelles, to complete that picture, and you finish it in the manner you have begun it, it will be a pleasure to hang it at Cheriton House."

Jim Lascelles was touched by the kindness of his patron.

"I didn't quite see my way, Lord Cheriton," said he, with admirable simplicity, "to offer you an apology for my rotten behavior, because you know you did rub it in, but I am going to now. And I hope you'll accept it, because you've been so kind to me—much kinder to me than you ought to have been, really."

"Yes, Lascelles," said Cheriton, impartially, "I am inclined to take that view myself. But your father was good to me at school; and you are young, and you have talent, and you have a great subject to work upon, and I can't help feeling that it would be a pity if you lost the opportunity which, in a sense, you have already had the wit to create. Mind, Lascelles, I don't excuse you in the least. I palliate nothing; take your conduct all round it has been abominable; but in my humble judgment, had it been more correct than it has been I personally should not take such a hopeful view of your future. For you have conformed to my fundamental belief that all the men who are worth anything must begin by breaking the rules. Although have the goodness to remember, my dear Lascelles, when you come to breaking the rules be careful how you do it, for it is very easy to get expelled the school. And should that happen—well, of course, you are done for unless you are able to found a school of your own."

Jim Lascelles forbore to smile at this piece of didacticism. He was very full of gratitude. The old blighter had behaved so much more nicely than he need have done.

"If only I had genius," said Jim, "I would give up my days to the fashioning of the most absolute masterpiece that ever adorned the walls of Cheriton House."

"You remember Carlyle's definition?" said the owner thereof.

"Carlyle was an old fool."

"That was always my opinion. And I once had the privilege of telling him so, and, what is more, the noisy fellow admitted it. Doubtless what he meant to express by his definition was the fact that Genius is perfect submission to the Idea."

"Well, here goes for perfect submission to the Idea," said Jim Lascelles.

He took up his brush and his palette, and gave a very deft touch to the vestments of Miss Perry.

"Do you like my new riding-habit?" said a perfectly ludicrous drawl coming in through the door.

Jim Lascelles made a gesture of despair. He kept his back turned upon the new riding-habit resolutely.

"Dear me!" said Cheriton, "Artemis."

"Isn't it silly?" said Miss Perry. "They don't like you to jump the railings in Rotten Row."

"What is the source of your information?" inquired my lord.

"Gobo says so," said Miss Perry.

"Put not your faith in that man, my dear Miss Goose," said Cheriton, mellifluously. "It is only because he is afraid of taking a toss."

"But they have got *po-lice-men*," said Miss Perry, impressively.

There can be no reasonable doubt that in her new riding-habit Miss Perry looked perfectly distracting. Lord Cheriton was certainly of that opinion. As for Jim Lascelles, he waved her away from him with great energy.

"That is the sort of thing," said he, with an appeal for sympathy and protection.

"Miss Goose," said Lord Cheriton, "Mr. Lascelles has made a serious indictment against you."

"Has he?" said Miss Perry, opening very large, very round, and very blue eyes upon Jim.

"Mr. Lascelles complains," said Cheriton, with paternal severity, "that while he is assiduously engaged in copying that famous portrait of your great-grandmamma, you persist in coming into this room in your smartest gowns; in sitting in the middle of that sofa; in absorbing the best light; in posing in a manner that no really sensitive painter can possibly resist; with the melancholy result that you literally force him to paint you instead of your great-grandmamma, quite, as he assures me, against his rational judgment and his natural inclination."

"Oh, I don't mind at all," said Miss Perry, with charming friendliness. "It made me rather tired at first holding my chin like this, but at the end of an hour I always get a cream bun."

"At the end of an hour you always get a cream bun! Do you indeed?"

"Yes," said Miss Perry, "small ones, but they are almost as nice as the large ones."

"I hope, Lascelles," said Cheriton, "you have something to offer by way of extenuation?"

"Well, what can a fellow do?" said Jim, desperately. "What with the sun stuck up there, and this pink and white and blue and yellow arrangement. As for the chin—well, if a chin will curve like that it must take the consequences."

Cheriton was shocked.

"Say as little as possible, Lascelles, I entreat you," said he. "Your case is hopeless. But I feel bound to say this. Since we have had this astounding allegation of the cream buns, without probing the matter to the depths, which I am really afraid to do, I must say your future as a painter seems more roseate than ever."

"Thank you, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, modestly.

"But in regard to your future as a human being, as a unit of society, I prefer to exercise a wise discretion which will take the form of saying nothing whatever upon the subject."

"Thank you, Lord Cheriton," said Jim again.

Jim Lascelles then turned his gaze upon Miss Perry. It was of such singular resolution that it seemed as if it sought to hypnotize that irresponsible person to maintain the semblance of discretion.

"If you will go and put on that new frock," said he, in a manner that Cheriton was forced to regard as effrontery, "we can get just an hour before luncheon, and then to-morrow you will start a cream bun in hand."

The prospect offered seemed sufficiently enticing to Miss Perry.

"That will be awfully nice."

She left the room with great cheerfulness.

Cheriton regarded Jim Lascelles with that paternal air which he was wont to assume rather frequently towards the world in general.

"Lascelles," said he, "I shall have to revise my

estimate of your attainments. It is becoming increasingly clear to my mind that you may go far."

"Gillet said if I applied myself," said Jim, without immodesty, "I might be able one day to paint a portrait."

"Gillet's opinion is valuable," said Cheriton, with the air of one who set a higher value upon his own opinion than he did upon that of Gillet. He examined Jim's work very critically. "Yes," he said, "I recognize your possibilities. You have had the wit to find a subject, and I am hopeful that the artist will prove entirely worthy of it."

Jim's face expressed his pleasure. After all, he had the talent and ambition of every honest craftsman.

"Lascelles," said his patron, "may I give you a word of advice?"

Jim expressed himself gratified at the prospect of receiving it.

"It is this," said Cheriton, slowly. "You must get into the habit of charging more for your pictures."

"I hope I shall be able to," said Jim. "But times are hard, and it is uphill work for a man without a reputation."

"I appreciate that. But I heard you spoken of as the coming man the other night, and I see no reason why you shouldn't confirm the prediction."

"If only I had a little more talent," said Jim.

"If only you had a little more faith in it, Lascelles.

It is the faith that is so necessary, as every artist tells us."

"I suppose so. Yet all the same, I wish the fairies had been a little kinder."

"I am of opinion that they have been sufficiently kind to the man who could pose that head and put that hair upon canvas. But what I wanted particularly to say to you is this. My friend Kendal intends to ask you to paint a portrait of his daughter Priscilla."

Jim Lascelles was thrilled by this announcement.

"That is awfully good of him," said he, "and awfully good of you, Lord Cheriton."

"Perhaps I have the more genuine title to your gratitude," said Cheriton, amiably, "because, as far as Kendal is concerned, he is one of those undiscerning and sluggish fellows who always prefer to take some one else's opinion rather than form one of their own. I told him you were the man to paint his daughter Priscilla, and he was only too glad to have my word for it. And I am by no means sure you are not."

Jim Lascelles was at a loss to know how to express his sense of obligation, particularly as he could not help feeling that he did not merit such kindness.

"I wish now," said he, "I hadn't behaved so badly."

"The worst of any sort of bad behavior," said Cheriton, sententiously, "is that it carries such a heavy premium. But no matter. The chief thing is to behave well to my friend Kendal. Paint his

daughter Priscilla to the best of your ability, and be careful to charge him five hundred guineas."

Jim was staggered.

"Five hundred guineas!" said he. "Why, he will never pay it. He could get an absolute first rater for that sum."

Cheriton smiled sagaciously.

"Doubtless he could," said he, "and if my friend Kendal pays five hundred guineas he will consider he's got one. When I come to examine your masterpiece on the wall of his gloomy and draughty dining-room in Yorkshire, I shall say, 'Kendal, that picture of Priscilla appears to be an uncommonly sound piece of work.' And he will say as proud as you please, 'I should think it was, my dear fellow. That young chap Lascelles turned out absolutely first rate. He charged five hundred guineas for that picture. I am telling everybody.'"

Jim Lascelles found his good fortune a little difficult to accept. Further, he seemed to be rather troubled by it.

"I hope it is quite fair to Lord Kendal," he said, "to charge him five hundred guineas for a picture I should be only too glad to paint for fifty?"

Cheriton was amused.

"My dear Lascelles," said he, "simplicity is greatly to be desired in art, but it is well not to take it into the market-place. There is the man with whom you are doing business to be considered. If my friend Kendal paid fifty guineas for the picture of his daughter Priscilla, he would think exactly ten

times less of it than if he paid five hundred; and instead of hanging it in his dining-room in the worst possible light, he would hang it in one of the smaller bedrooms in a very much better one."

Cheriton's homily was interrupted at this point by the return of Miss Perry. In her Gainsborough gown which she had worn at the fancy ball, and in her "incredible" hat, which by some miracle had been clapped on at just the right angle, she looked more distracting than any human creature ought really to do. She seated herself in the middle of the sofa with great composure, tilted her chin to the light of the morning, and folded her hands in her lap with almost the air of a professional.

"Out for blood," said Jim, approvingly.

"Lascelles," said Cheriton, "I am almost afraid this means a large one."

"Yes," said Jim, "I am a poor and obscure painter, but this zeal to serve the arts really merits encouragement."

"Perhaps, Lascelles," said Cheriton, "if Buszard is sincerely interested in art, as one feels sure he must be, he might be induced to make a reduction upon the large ones if you contracted for a quantity."

Jim Lascelles was frankly delighted with the pose, and worked very happily. He was in high spirits. Thanks to his patron's generosity, he had got out of his difficulty far more easily than he could have hoped to have done. His future prospects had also taken a sudden and remarkable turn for the better. Yet,

apart from these considerations, his subject fired him. As he worked during this precious hour he felt that his execution had never had such boldness, freedom, and authenticity.

Cheriton watched his *protégé* with approval. As a critic he was sufficiently accomplished to detect great possibilities in Jim's method. Here might be a genuine *trouvaille*, if the young fellow only had thoroughness as well as courage.

Miss Perry had not moved her chin once for nearly an hour, so that she felt her guerdon was as good as earned; Jim Lascelles had yielded for the same period to a genuine inspiration; and Cheriton sat at his ease, watching with every outward sign of satisfaction the fair fruits which were springing from his liberal treatment of the artistic temper, when this harmony of sitter, painter, and patron was gravely imperiled by the entrance of a little fat dog. As usual, he heralded the approach of an old woman leaning upon an ebony stick.

No sooner had the old woman entered the blue drawing-room than she stood dumfounded with amazement. And yet there is reason to believe that this attitude was in some measure assumed. Jim Lascelles continued to ply his brush in blissful ignorance of her presence; Miss Perry, for political reasons, continued strictly to maintain her pose. Cheriton, however, put up a solemn forefinger. Nevertheless, signs were not wanting that the mistress of the house was about to disregard his warning.

"Ssssh, Caroline!" said he.

"What, pray, is the meaning of this?" demanded the old lady.

"This is a most critical stage," said Cheriton. "Three minutes more and I shall invite you to speak with freedom."

"Tell me," snorted the old lady. "Why is that girl sitting there in that manner in the gewgaws of a play-actress?"

"Sssh, Caroline! Don't you see?"

The perfect composure of the fair sitter, and the fact that she chose to remain deaf, dumb, and blind to the intruder, seemed to exasperate that autocrat.

"Tell me, girl, what is the meaning of it?" she stormed.

She beat the carpet with the ebony walking stick.

"Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said," Jim whispered.

The filmy, far-away look continued in the eyes of Miss Perry. She paid heed to none.

Cheriton continued to elevate his forefinger very gravely.

"Sssh, Caroline!" said he. "One short and brief minute more. The whole situation is most critical."

"Is the creature hypnotized?"

"Yes, she is undoubtedly."

"Who gave permission for her to sit for her portrait? In those fal-lals, too."

"Nature gave her permission, amiable old Dame Nature. She couldn't refuse it."

"I forbid it," said Caroline, with all the energy

of which she was capable. "It is disgraceful. It shall not go on."

Then it was that Miss Perry ventured to say something.

"Large cream bun to-morrow morning, please," said she.

"Is it an hour?" said Jim Lascelles. "Dear me! how time flies! One can hardly believe it."

"Girl," said the old lady, "I demand an explanation."

As Miss Perry seemed to have no explanation to offer, Cheriton came to her aid.

"The truth is," said he, in honeyed tones, "my distinguished young friend Lascelles is the victim of a very natural error. My idea was, of course, Caroline, as you are aware, that he should come here to copy your Gainsborough, but it would appear that he has put another interpretation upon his mandate. And I feel bound to confess that I for one cannot blame him."

Caroline Crewkerne, however, was not appeased so easily.

"In my opinion," said she, "it is unpardonable that any man should take it upon himself to paint clandestinely the portrait of my niece. And in my house, too."

Jim held himself very proudly and perhaps a little disdainfully also. The old woman's tone was certainly offensive.

"Lady Crewkerne," said he, not so humbly as he might have done, "I will admit that I have done

wrong, but I hope my offense is not a very grave one."

The old lady looked Jim over in a decidedly scornful manner. She appeared to be not quite sure whether a person such as Jim was entitled to receive a reply from her.

"It depends upon the light in which one chooses to view the subject," said she, in a voice which trembled with anger. "I have formed my own opinion about such behavior. I must ask you to leave this house immediately, and in future it will be closed to you."

Jim was stung. The mildest-tempered fellow in the world would have been by such an unbridled display of despotism. Cheriton, who by long association with the Whigs understood their arbitrary nature, was really less shocked by such an uncivil exhibition than he pretended to be. He took Jim Lascelles by the sleeve, drew him aside, and gave him the benefit of a whimsical smile.

"Say nothing, my dear fellow," said he, in a sagacious and paternal manner. "Give her her head, and then leave her to me."

Jim Lascelles, however, was furious. He was young and hot-headed; and adversity had rendered him more sensitive upon the score of his dignity than it is wise for a young fellow to be. Therefore he was by no means disposed to leave the adjustment of the matter to his friend. Not by his demeanor only did he express resentment, but by word and also by deed.

"I am sorry, Lady Crewkerne, you have taken this view," said he, not very pacifically. "I shall be quite happy to obey your instructions. A couple of men will come from Peabody's this afternoon to fetch the canvas."

And then, with an incredible absence of judgment, Jim Lascelles packed up his tools, and distributing curt bows to everybody, stalked out of the room and out of the house.

Cheriton showed genuine consternation. Miss Perry looked ready to shed tears. Cream buns apart, she was very fond of Jim.

"An incomprehensibly foolish thing to have done," said Cheriton.

"A deplorable exhibition of impudence," said Caroline Crewkerne. "I have the greatest mind not to give up that canvas. I should be within my rights if I destroyed it."

"I have grave doubts whether you could do it legally," said Cheriton.

For a man of his vaunted wisdom and experience it was a sadly injudicious thing to have said.

"You think so?" said the redoubtable Caroline. "That decides me. That man must be taught a lesson. Cheriton, have the goodness to ring the bell."

Cheriton showed genuine concern.

"Surely, Caroline," said he, "you cannot mean that you are going to destroy it?"

"That is my intention."

"Oh, but surely," said Cheriton, "it would be

nothing short of a crime. There is no other word to use."

"It is going to be done," said Caroline Crewkerne.

"But the young fellow has put many hours of fine work into that picture," said Cheriton, with great seriousness, "and fine thought in it too. It would be a crime."

"If a man has no manners he must be taught them," said the implacable Caroline.

"The kettle is invariably the severest judge of the pot," said Cheriton, in a whimsical aside. "Really, Caroline, you began it," said he.

"The man began it by painting my niece's portrait without obtaining my permission. Not content with abusing my hospitality, he must show insolence when remonstrated with."

"Well, you know, my dear Caroline, that hand of yours is uncommonly heavy. And although no one deplores the young fellow's conduct for his own sake more deeply than I do, he acted precisely as his profoundly rash and hot-headed father would have done in the circumstances."

"I am not in the least interested in such a person, or in his father either," said Caroline Crewkerne. "But I have made up my mind that that canvas shall be destroyed."

CHAPTER XV

DIPLOMACY IS CALLED FOR

CHERITON'S gravity was of a kind he seldom displayed.

"Caroline," said he, firmly, "if you behaved in that way no right-minded person could possibly forgive you. The lad is very poor, and his history is a sad one. He is the son of Lascelles, V.C., as rash yet generous-hearted a fellow as ever lived. Had it not been for a dishonest broker the young chap would be a man of wealth and position."

"I am prepared to hear nothing further upon the subject," said Caroline Crewkerne. "I have made up my mind. Cheriton, have the goodness to ring the bell."

The affair must have had a tragic termination there and then had not the God who watches over poor painters—whatever their own private and personal doubts in regard to that Deity, it is only right for laymen like ourselves to assume that there is one—seen fit to enact a little providence of His own. At that crucial moment there came to Cheriton's aid no less a person that George Betterton. And as if that opportune arrival was not in itself sufficient, Providence took the trouble to play a double coup. Mr.

Marchbanks made the announcement almost immediately afterwards that luncheon was ready.

While Caroline enlarged upon her grievances to George Betterton and outlined the extreme course she proposed to take as soon as luncheon was over, Cheriton scribbled hastily in pencil on the back of a card, "Remove picture from No. — Hill Street immediately, to the Acacias, Hawthorn Road, Balham."

This accomplished, he proceeded to take John into his confidence. He placed the card, together with a sovereign, in the palm of that functionary.

"Go down at once," said he, "to the people at the Bond Street Galleries and give them this card. They are to remove that half-finished picture in the blue drawing-room to that address. By the time luncheon is over it must be out of the house. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly clear, my lord," said John, who among his many virtues had a proper tenderness for the peerage.

"See that this is done, and when questions are asked all you need know upon the subject is that a couple of men came and took it away. You understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord," said John.

During luncheon Cheriton was seen to particular advantage. At any time it called for very little effort on his part for him to be one of the most agreeable men in London. To-day he excelled. He retailed some of the newest stories and a quantity of the freshest gossip; he was really genial to George Betterton, and encouraged him to enlarge at length upon the

subject of the Militia; and to his hostess he gave a tip for the Oaks, for which species of information she had a decided weakness.

It was but seldom among his intimates that George was permitted to mount his hobby-horse. As for Cheriton, he was the last man in the world, as a rule, to consent to hold the head of that extraordinary quadruped while George established himself firmly in the saddle. But on this occasion he performed that operation in the most graceful manner.

"Excellent speech of yours in the House the other evening, my dear fellow," said he. "I wasn't there myself—Philosophical Society's annual meeting—but you were very carefully reported in the *Times*. Quite your best vein, if I may say so. Very shrewd, very searching, sound common sense. You thought so, Caroline, did you not?"

It seems incredible, but Caroline Crewkerne walked straight into the trap. With all her ruthlessness, and all her knowledge of mundane affairs, she had one besetting weakness. She attached an absurd importance to any form of politics. It was her Whiggism, doubtless. She would encourage the most consummate bore, for upon the slightest pretext her vanity would lead her to believe that her fingers were really in the pie, and that she had a very considerable hand in the destinies of the country.

In the heydey of her glory it used to be asserted freely by idle persons that if the country was not actually ruled from Hill Street, ministers at least were made and marred there, and of that quarter Gov-

ernments went in fear and trembling. And it is by no means improbable that Caroline Crewkerne came to believe it. It is surprising what vanity will do for us.

To-day the smoldering embers of a life-long illusion, if the figure is permitted, allowed Caroline Crewkerne to establish George Betterton quite firmly astride his hobby-horse. Cheriton counted the minutes of his exquisite boredom. George was always heavy. He spoke so slowly and impressively that he could deliver a platitude in a longer space of time than any man living, and he could use fewer words in the operation. Indeed, upon the strength of that gift he had gained a reputation for incisive brevity.

To see Caroline Crewkerne nodding her vain old head, and wagging her vain old ears in an exaggerated attitude of statesmanlike attention, was a positive joy to Cheriton, particularly as time was so valuable. The minutes grew tedious in their passing, all the same. The clock chimed half-past two, and Miss Perry mentioned the circus.

"Let us postpone it until to-morrow, my dear Miss Goose, if you really don't mind," said Cheriton. "The conversation is so absorbing. The preserved ginger is highly delectable too."

Miss Perry shared the latter opinion.

"Green Chartreuse or Grand Marnier, my lord?" said Mr. Marchbanks.

"Both," said my lord.

Mr. Marchbanks dissembled his surprise in an extremely well-bred manner. In his eyes, however, a

peer of the realm was in the happy position of Cæsar's wife.

It must not be assumed, however, that Cheriton indulged in both these luxuries. His respect for the internal economy forbade that course. But observing that George Betterton selected Green Chartreuse he contrived to smuggle unseen the Grand Marnier to George's side of the table. He then addressed his mind to slumber. After a full twenty minutes thus blissfully stolen he awoke with a little start.

"Beg pardon, George," said he. "Did I understand you to say the Militia had gone to the dooce and the country must be reconstructed, or that the Country had gone to the dooce and the Militia must be reconstructed?"

"The Country, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, in her most *affairé* manner; "certainly the Country."

"What a good head you have, Caroline!" said Cheriton, giving expression to a somnolent admiration. "Take after your father. Sorry to interrupt you, George. Most able discourse. By the way, Caroline, you never give one the treat of the famous old brandy these days. Not for myself. I never touch brandy; but I was thinking of George. It is known to be excellent for any kind of disquisition."

George Betterton, duly fortified with a little of the famous old brandy, and with a yet further supply of Grand Marnier, which Cheriton caused to be conveyed to him, proceeded on his victorious way.

"Country gone to the dogs—yes," said Cheriton.

"Militia gone to the dooce—quite so. Circus to-morrow, Miss Goose. But Gobo quite educational too."

Cheriton addressed himself again to slumber, with a peaceful, resigned, yet vastly contented air.

It was five minutes past three before Caroline Crewkerne quitted the table. In spite of her fund of natural shrewdness she could not help feeling—so easy it is for the wisest people to deceive themselves in some things—that she had sat at the feet of a political Gamaliel who played ducks and drakes with the War Office. As for George Betterton, having been endured with a patience that was not always extended to him, without actually giving himself airs, he felt that upon the subject of the Militia he really was no end of a fellow. Cheriton, who had enjoyed an additional thirty-five minutes of undisturbed repose, gave him clearly to understand that he concurred in that opinion.

Back in the drawing-room, Caroline Crewkerne re-affirmed her intention of destroying the half-finished portrait of Miss Perry.

"An unpardonable piece of presumption in the first place," said she. "And, in the second, the man was positively insolent."

Cheriton had already looked for the canvas, and with a whimsical little sigh of satisfaction had looked in vain. It would seem that the myrmidons of the Bond Street Galleries had done their work.

"Do be more lenient, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, persuasively. "The fellow is young, and

his lot is hard. Pray don't take the bread out of the mouth of a rising genius who has to support his mother. George, my dear fellow, throw the weight of your great influence into the scale. Caroline must be more humane. Rising young man—highly susceptible—wholly captivated by our distracting Miss Goose. Any young fellow with any sort of instinct for nature at her choicest would have done the same."

Cheriton concluded upon an exclamation from the redoubtable Caroline.

"Why," she cried, "the picture has been taken away!"

Mr. Marchbanks was summoned.

"Two men from Peabody's fetched it an hour ago, my lady," Mr. Marchbanks explained.

"Without my permission," stormed his mistress.

"I had no instructions, my lady," said Mr. Marchbanks. "I was under the impression that it was the property of the young painting gentleman."

"You were under the impression!"

"Caroline," said Cheriton gravely, "if you have not been properly scored off it looks uncommonly like it. Young fellow evidently didn't allow the grass to grow under his feet. He said he would send for it to-morrow, but he seems to have changed his mind. But, in my humble judgment, if you must blame anybody you will do well to blame George. If he hadn't been so devilish interesting on the subject of the Militia it would never have happened."

CHAPTER XVI

HYDE PARK

LITTLE recked Jim Lascelles of the train of circumstances which enabled his precious half-finished work to return to its maker. When it arrived at his hermitage at Balham that afternoon, he merely saw in its premature return an additional affront. He took it for granted that the old woman of Hill Street had ordered it out of the house.

"An absolutely inconceivable old cat," Jim assured his mother with great truculence.

"I am afraid so, my son," said his mother, sagely. "Power is so bad for poor Female Us."

"She has ruined me," said Jim, miserably. "She and that infernal temper of mine."

"Temper is feminine too, my son," said Jim's mother, profoundly. "She invariably plays Old Harry when she gets hold of the reins."

Perhaps it ought to be stated that Jim's mother had recently tried to eke out her slender purse by writing a novel. At least, that is the only explanation there is to offer of how she came to be so wise. The writing of novels is very good for the mind, as all the world knows.

Jim was woefully gloomy for many days. He felt

that by his unlucky outburst he had irretrievably ruined his prospects. And they were getting bright so suddenly that they had almost seemed to dazzle him. Not only had he forfeited the hundred pounds which Lord Cheriton had promised him for a faithful copy of the Gainsborough, but doubtless, after his unhappy exhibition of temper, Lord Kendal's daughter Priscilla would choose to be painted by somebody else.

This, however, was not the worst. The Goose Girl had passed clean out of his ken. Henceforward he would be debarred the sight of the Gainsborough hat, the lilac frock, and the full-fledged cream-bun appearance. She had driven the unfortunate young fellow so nearly to distraction that while he found it impossible to expel her from his thoughts, he could not summon the resolution to unlock the door of the studio he had caused to be set up in the small Balham back garden. It was nothing less than an affliction to gaze upon the half-finished canvas, which now could never be completed.

By nature Jim Lascelles was a bright and cheery soul. But the fact that he had destroyed his prospects "just as things were coming his way" by a single unbridled act, made him extremely unhappy. It needed all Mrs. Lascelles' gay courage and invincible optimism to keep Jim steady during these days of trial.

"Finish her out of your head, laddie," said she, "then try to forget that she ever existed."

"Nay," said Jim. "I must either put all I know

into that little work, or stick a knife through the canvas."

Jim brooded dreadfully upon the subject. Black rings came under his eyes; he smoked too much and ate too little.

"I must and I will see her," said Jim.

"That is the true spirit, my son," said his mother, cheerfully.

It is not quite clear whether she ought openly to have expressed her approval. It was very necessary, all the same, to rouse the unhappy Jim from the lethargy that was making his life unbearable. At all events, he seemed to derive a certain inward power from the mere resolution.

The next morning Jim made his way to Hyde Park. It was now June and it was looking its best, with the trees, the rhododendrons, and the ladies in full bloom. For some time he stood by the railings with a kind of indefinite hope that he would be rewarded for his pilgrimage. Then he began to walk slowly in the direction of Knightsbridge; and confronted by so much fine plumage, he began to wish ruefully that his blue suit was not so shabby and that his straw hat was not in its second season.

He was still hopeful, however. He took a careful survey of the riders. Somewhat oddly, his attention was attracted to a heavy, red-faced, rather stupid-looking man who was pounding along on a gray horse. His appearance was perfectly familiar to Jim Lascelles, yet for the moment he could not remember where and when he had seen him.

It was with an odd mingling of satisfaction and disgust that he was able to recall the heavy red-faced man's identity. He stopped and turned his eyes to follow him in his progress. Yes, it was he undoubtedly. And there at the corner by Apsley House was a chestnut horse, tall, upstanding, proudly magnificent, surmounted by a royal creature crowned with the light of the morning. At the respectful distance of thirty paces was Mr. Bryant, seated as upright as his own cockade upon a more modest charger. Even he, a man of austere taste and exclusive instinct, did not attempt to conceal an air of legitimate pride in his company. Mr. Bryant had seen nothing that morning, nor many mornings previously, that could in any wise compare with the wonderful Miss Perry.

Doubtless it is hardly right to say that Jim Lascelles' eyes were envious when they followed the man with the red face, and marked his paternal greeting of the Goose Girl. It is hardly fair, for envy is a vulgar passion, and Jim was too good a fellow ever to be really vulgar in anything. All the same, it must be confessed that he swore to himself softly. He then behaved in a very practical and mundane manner. He took out his watch, one of those admirable American five-shilling watches which are guaranteed to keep correct time for a very long period.

"Three minutes past eleven," said he. "Oho, my merry man!"

Precisely what Jim Lascelles meant by that mystic

exclamation it is difficult to know, but anyhow it seemed to please him. He then observed that the little cavalcade had wheeled round the corner, and had started to come down slowly by the railings upon the left.

Jim stood to await it with a beating heart. It was a most injudicious thing to do, but he was in a desperate and defiant humor.

"Five to one she cuts you," Jim muttered. "Two to one she cuts you dead. They are all alike when they mount the high horse."

As Jim Lascelles stood to await the approach of the cavalcade, he no longer thought ruefully of his cheap straw hat and his shabby blue suit. They had become dear to him as the badge of his impending martyrdom.

Gobo hugged the railings. He was so close to Jim Lascelles that he nearly touched him with his spurs—dummy spurs, as Jim noted. Miss Perry was explaining that all the girls had white frocks at Buckingham Palace, and how she wished that Muffin had been there, as a white frock always suited her, although she was inclined to tear it, when Miss Featherbrain was met by the steady and unflinching gaze of Jim Lascelles. Instantly her hand went up, not one of darned cotton, but a yellow gauntleted affair that matched her hair, in quite the regulation Widdiford manner.

"Why — why," she cried, "it's Jim! Hallo, Jim!"

In the ears of Jim Lascelles the incomparably fool-

ish speech had never sounded so absurd and so delicious. It was plainly the intention of Miss Perry to hold animated conversation with the undeniably handsome youth who returned her greeting. But the intervention of the highest branch of the peerage, as solemn as the British Constitution and as solid too, between her and the railings; and the fact that there was a resolutely oncoming rearguard in the person of the scandalized Mr. Bryant, who in his own mind was tolerably sure that the presumptuous young man by the railings had no connection with the peerage whatever, sufficed to keep Miss Perry in the straight path.

Therefore Jim Lascelles had to be content with one of the old Widdiford smiles, which nevertheless was enchanting, and a parting wave of the yellow gauntlet, which was the perfection of friendliness, comradeship, and natural simplicity. He stood to watch the cavalcade pass slowly down the ride, the magnificent chestnut and its rider the observed of all observers, for both were superb and profoundly simple works of nature. The red-faced and stolid personage on the gray, a more sophisticated pair, were yet well in the picture also, for if less resplendent, they too in their way were imposing.

Jim's reverie was interrupted by a voice at his elbow.

" There they go," it said, " the most ill-assorted pair in England."

With a start of surprise Jim turned to find an immaculate beside him. Cheriton was wearing a

light gray frockcoat with an exaggerated air of fashion.

"Crabbed age and youth," said Jim, yet quite without bitterness. He was still glowing with pleasure at his frank and friendly recognition.

"A pitiful sight," said Cheriton. "A man of his age! How odd it is that some men are born without a sense of the incongruous!"

"Yes," said Jim.

"Gal looks well outside a horse. Very well indeed. Pity that old ruffian should ruin so fair a picture."

Cheriton seemed prepared to criticise his rival's style of horsemanship. Reluctantly, however, he forbore to do so. For George had been drilled very severely in his youth; and in spite of his years and his weight he was able to make a creditable appearance in the saddle.

"Do you know, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, "I almost regret that I did not attempt an equestrian portrait."

My lord's brows went up.

"Upon my word, Lascelles," said he, "you are an uncommonly bold fellow to mention the word 'portrait.'"

"I agree with you," said Jim.

He laughed rather bitterly. Cheriton affected a gravely paternal air.

"Lascelles," said he, "I think the fact that at school your father imbued me with the elements of wisdom gives some sort of sanction to a little plain speaking on my part."

"Go on, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, with gloomy resignation. "Rub it in."

"I think, Lascelles," said Cheriton, with a fine assumption of the air of a "head beak," "your conduct merits censure in the highest degree."

"It has received it," said Jim. "I have been kicking myself for being such a hot-headed fool ever since it happened."

"One is almost afraid," said Cheriton, ruefully, "that your indiscretion is irreparable. Really, Lascelles, making due allowance for the fact that your father was one of the most rash and hasty men I ever encountered, and allowing further for the fact that my old friend has a deplorable absence of, shall we say, amenity, your behavior amounted neither more nor less than to suicide."

"I don't regret what I did," said Jim, "as far as that old Gorgon of a woman is concerned. I am afraid I should behave in just the same way again if I were placed in a similar position. But I know it was very unwise. As for the portrait, I intend, by hook or by crook, to finish it."

"Well, Lascelles," said Cheriton, giving the young fellow a kindly touch on the arm in parting, "do what you can; and when the work is complete you must let me see it."

It was a new Jim Lascelles who returned to Balham by the twelve-thirty from Victoria and took luncheon with his mother. He called at the greengrocer's just as you get out of the station, and arrived at the Acacias with a number of paper bags tucked under

each arm. He hummed the favorite air in the very latest musical comedy, while he proceeded to make a salad whose mysteries he had acquired in Paris. He had been initiated into them by Monsieur Bonnat, the famous *chef* of the Hotel Brinvilliers. And it so happened that Jim's mother, who spoiled him completely, had purchased a lobster, which she really couldn't afford, such was the current price of that delicacy and the present state of her finances, to cheer Jim up a bit.

"My dear," said Jim, "let us have the last bottle of the Johannisberg."

Miranda, the demure little maid-of-all-work, was ordered rather magnificently to procure the same.

"Pity 'tis, 'tis the last," said Jim, who proceeded to toast his mother. "May those precious publishers," said he, "learn truly to appreciate a very remarkable literary genius, my dear."

"I am afraid they do, dear boy," said she. "That is the trouble."

"It is a rattling good story, anyhow," said Jim, stoutly.

"It certainly ends as every self-respecting and well-conducted story ought. But this old addle-pate hasn't a spark of literary genius in it."

"Oh, hasn't it!" said Jim, bringing his fist upon the table. "George Sand is a fool to you, my dear."

"Dear fellow," said Jim's mother, with a smile of pleasure. "At any rate I am enough of a genius to like appreciation. But with you, laddie, it is differ-

ent. You are the real right thing, as dear Henry James would say."

"Oh, am I?" said Jim. "Well, here's to the Real Right Thing, whichever of us has it. I know which side of the table it is, if you don't."

"The Realest Rightest Thing is outside in the garden waiting for the hand of the master to complete her."

"Ye gods, the hand of the master! You pile it on 'a leetle beet tick,' as Monsieur Gillet would say to you. But shall I tell you a secret? I saw the Goose Girl this morning."

"Of course you did, dear boy."

"How did you guess?"

"The step on the gravel told me."

"You are wonderful, you know. Fancy your finding it out like that when I tried hard to tread heavily!"

"That vain, wicked, foolish, and depraved Goose!" said Jim's mother. "You met her in Hyde Park this morning walking with her duke, and she gave you a smile, and if she was more than usually foolish, she said, 'Why, it's Jim!'"

"She was *à cheval*. But you *are* wonderful, you know," said Jim.

"Riding was she? And pray how did the great overgrown creature look outside a horse?"

"I could never have believed it. She was mounted on a glorious chestnut, a great mountain of a beast, a noble stepper; and in her smart new habit, and in an extraordinarily coquettish bowler—think on it, my

dear, the Goose Girl in a bowler!—she was a picture for the gods."

"One can readily believe that the creature would set high Olympus in a roar."

"She was to the manner born. She might have learned the art of equitation in *la haute école* instead of in the home paddock at Widdiford on that screw of the dear old governor's."

"Oh no, dear boy," said Jim's mother, with decision. "Poor dear Melancthon was anything but a screw. He was by Martin Luther out of Moll Cutpurse. He won the point-to-point on three occasions."

"I humbly beg Melancthon's pardon. That explains why the Goose Girl comes to be so proficient. She certainly looked this morning as if she had never sat anything less than the blood of Carbine."

"I think the secret of the whole matter, my son," said Jim's mother, profoundly, "is that the Female Us is so marvelously adaptable. If she is really smartly turned out on a fine morning in June with a real live duke on the off side of her and all London gazing at her, if she had never learned to sit anything else than a donkey she would still contrive to look as though she had won the whole gymkhana. It is just that quality that makes the Female Us so wonderful. It is just that that maketh Puss so soon get too big for her dancing slippers."

"Well, you wise woman," said Jim, "the Goose Girl would have taken all the prizes this morning. And she didn't even cut me."

"Cut you, my son!" exclaimed Jim's mother. "Gott in himmel! that Goose cut you indeed!"

"There are not many Goose Girls that wouldn't have done in the circumstances. But she is True Blue. And I am going to finish her portrait. And I am going to make her permanently famous."

Jim's mother tilted the last of the Johannisberg into his glass.

"Go in and win, dear boy," said she. "You have genius. Lavish it upon her. Earn fame and fortune, and buy back the Red House at Widdiford."

"And in the meantime," said Jim, "she will have married that old fossil and borne him three children."

"She will not, dear boy," said the voice of the temptress, "if you make her promise not to."

"Oh, that wouldn't be cricket," said Jim, "with her people so miserably poor and James Lascelles by no means affluent; and the old fossil with a house in Piccadilly, and another in Notts, and another in Fifeshire, and a yacht in the Solent, and a box at the Opera, and a mausoleum at Kensal Green. No, old lady, I'm afraid it wouldn't be cricket."

Jim's mother exposed herself to the censure of all self-respecting people.

"It would be far less like cricket," said she, "for that perfect dear of a Goose to have her youth, her beauty, and her gayety purchased by a worldly old ruffian who ought to be a grandfather. Come, sir, she awaits her very parfit gentil knight."

But Jim shook his head solemnly.

"No, old lady," said he, "I am afraid it wouldn't be playing the game."

Nevertheless, immediately luncheon was over, Jim took the key of his studio off the sitting-room chimney-piece, and went forth to the misshapen wooden erection in the small Balham back garden. The key turned in the lock stiffly. It was nearly three weeks since it had last been in it. For several hours he worked joyfully, touching and retouching the picture and improvising small details out of his head. And all the time the Goose Girl smiled upon him in the old Widdiford manner. Her hair had never looked so yellow, and her eyes had never looked so blue.

CHAPTER XVII

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEMALE US

THE next morning, a little before eleven, the wonderful Miss Perry, accompanied by the admirable Mr. Bryant, was approaching Apsley House when the figure of a solitary horseman was to be seen. It had a combination of unexpectedness and familiarity which fixed Miss Perry's attention. She gave a little exclamation. The horseman was unmistakably Jim Lascelles.

Jim received a most affectionate greeting.

"You are just in time," said he. "It is a near thing. Gobo is yonder in the offing. I was afraid he would get here before you."

Miss Perry was delighted but perplexed by a suggestion that Jim put forward. It was that they should go down the left while Gobo rode up on the right.

"But I promised Gobo," she said.

"Look here, Goose Girl," said Jim, with tremendous resolution, "do you suppose I have invested the last half-sovereign I have in the world on the worst hack in London, to be cut out by that old duffer? Come on round, you Goose, before he gets up."

Really Miss Perry is not to be blamed. Jim Las-

celles was resolution incarnate once he had made up his mind. Jim's horse, a nondescript who does not merit serious notice, walked a few paces briskly, the chestnut followed its example, as chestnuts will, and the next thing was Jim's horse broke into a canter. The chestnut did the same. Of course it was Miss Perry's business to see that the chestnut did nothing of the sort. But it has to be recorded that she failed in her obvious duty. And then, so swift is the road to destruction, in less time than it takes to inform the incredulous reader, the chestnut and the nondescript began literally to fly down Rotten Row.

It was a golden morning of glorious June, and, of course, things constantly happen at that vernal season. But as the four pairs of irresponsible hoofs came thundering by, flinging up the tan in all directions and nearly knocking over a policeman, equestrians of both sexes, and pedestrians too, stared in polite amazement and very decided disapproval. If not absolutely contrary to the park regulations, it was certainly very wrong behavior.

There is every reason to suspect that the opinion of that high authority, Mr. Bryant, was even more uncompromising. Not for an instant did he attempt to cope with the pace that had been set. He was content sadly to watch his charge get farther and farther away. He then turned to look back at the man with the red face, who had just arrived at the turn.

That elevated personage, who could not see at all well without his spectacles, halted at the turn and

looked in vain for the wonderful Miss Perry. His friend Cheriton, who had entered the gates just in time to be *au courant* with all that had happened, accosted him cheerfully.

"Doctors' orders, George?"

"Ye-es," said George, rather gruffly.

"I warned you years ago, my dear fellow," said his friend, sympathetically, "that any man who drinks port wine in the middle of the day as a regular thing, can count later in life on the crown of the martyr."

George looked rather cross. He peered to the right and he peered to the left. The ever-receding pair were by now undecipherable to stronger eyes than those of George Betterton.

"Seen a gal about?" he inquired rather irritably. There never was a duke since the creation of the order who could endure to be kept waiting.

"I've seen several," said his friend, with an air of preternatural innocence.

"I mean that gal of Caroline Crewkerne's," said George.

"I was not aware that she had one."

"Tall, bouncing gal," said George. "Ginger hair."

"Ginger hair!" said his friend. "Tall, bouncing gal! Do you mean my ward, Miss Perry?"

"Your ward! What d'ye mean, Cheriton?"

"Caroline Crewkerne seems to think," said Cheriton, coolly, "that I shall serve the best interests of a lonely and unprotected and extraordinarily prepos-

sessing girlhood if I act, as it were, *in loco parentis* during Miss Perry's sojourn in the vast metropolis."

George began to gobble furiously. It was a sign, however, that his mind was working. That heavy and rusty mechanism was very difficult to set in motion.

"If it comes to that," said he, "I should say I am quite as capable of looking after the gal as you are."

"A matter of opinion, George, I assure you," said Cheriton, with genial candor.

"What d'ye mean?"

"For one thing, I am rather older than you. Therefore, in Caroline's opinion, I am better fitted to occupy the paternal office."

"Are you, though?" said George, stubbornly.

"I am sixty-five, you know," said his friend, with an air of modest pride. "The ideal age, if I may say so, for wisdom, experience, and knowledge of the world to coalesce in the service of innocence, beauty, and extreme youth. At least, I know that is Caroline Crewkerne's opinion."

"Goin' to marry the gal, are you?" said George, bluntly.

Some men are very blunt by nature.

"The exigencies of the situation may render that course expedient," said Cheriton, rather forensically. "But in any case, my dear George, speaking with the frankness to which I feel that my advantage in years entitles me, I am inclined to doubt the seemliness of the open pursuit by a man of nine and fifty of a wayside flower."

"What d'ye mean, Cheriton?" said George, with a more furious gobble than any he had yet achieved.

"What I really mean, my dear fellow," said his friend, "is that you can no longer indulge in the pleasures of the chase without your spectacles. Had you been furnished with those highly useful, if not specially ornamental adjuncts to the human countenance, you would have been able to observe that the wonderful Miss Perry—whose hair, by the way, is yellow—was spirited away exactly ninety seconds before you arrived on the scene."

"Who took her?" said George, who by now had grown purple with suppressed energy.

"A young fellow took her," said Cheriton. "A smart, dashing, well-set-up young fellow took her, my dear George. He simply came up, tossed her the handkerchief, and away they set off hell for leather. By now they are at the Albert Memorial."

No sooner was this information conveyed to him than George Betterton did a vain and foolish thing. Without bestowing another word upon Cheriton he set off in pursuit. It was supremely ridiculous that he should have behaved in any such fashion. But it is surprising how soon the most stalwart among us loses his poise; how soon the most careful performer topples off the tight-rope of perfect discretion and sanity. The spectacle of George pursuing the runaways with a haste that was almost as unseemly as their own was certainly romantic. And at the same time it provided infinitely pleasant food for the de-

tached observer who was responsible for George's behavior.

Cheriton stood to watch and to laugh sardonically. The marionette had begun to answer to the strings in delightful fashion. He promised to excel all anticipation.

In the meantime Young Blood was careering away like the wind. Faster and faster it went. It was higher, deeper, richer, more exhilarating than any of the old Widdiford madnesses. It was in vain that the British public looked pained and the London police looked important. This was its crowded hour of glorious life; and if there was to be an end to all things, there were two persons at least who felt that, after all, the cosmos had done very well to get itself invented.

However, this sort of thing cannot last forever. The nondescript soon began to display signs of distress.

"Bellows to mend," said Jim.

The glorious Miss Perry had difficulty in checking her chestnut.

"Why," said she, "he is almost as strong as your papa's pedigree hunter."

"We've done a record from the Red House to the Parsonage, I think," said Jim.

Even when they turned to ride back their high spirits met with no check. The crowded glorious hour continued, if pitched in a less emotional key. Jim's nondescript was no longer equal to the fine careless rapture.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "do you know I have made a resolution?"

"Have you, Jim?" said Miss Perry.

"I am determined to finish that picture of you in your wonderful Gainsborough frock."

"Of course, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"That picture is to be a masterpiece, you know."

"Is it, Jim?" said Miss Perry.

"Yes," said Jim. "And when it has made me famous what do you suppose I am going to do?"

"I don't know, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"Can't you guess?"

Miss Perry knitted her brows in grave perplexity.

"Marry Muffin."

"What, marry the Ragamuffin!" said Jim, scornfully.

"She is prettier than Polly is."

"But she *is* such a Ragamuffin; and she has never an incredible hat and a Gainsborough frock to call her own."

"She has her mauve, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"No," said Jim, decisively; "in spite of her mauve I decline to marry the Ragamuffin."

Miss Perry looked vastly disappointed.

"Milly is too young," said she.

Jim pressed the nondescript. The ice was getting desperately thin. And every moment the light of the morning was making it thinner.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "do you remember that once you promised to marry me?"

"Yes, I did, Jim," said Miss Perry, "if you got

those three big red-cheeked apples off the tree at the Red House at Widdiford."

"I got them off all right," said Jim. "But instead of receiving your hand in matrimony I got a tremendous licking."

"The apples were awfully nice, though," said Miss Perry, like a true daughter of Eve.

The high personage who controls the limelight continued to play most embarrassing tricks with the light of the morning. The hapless Jim Lascelles felt himself to be no match for that master hand.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, defiantly, "assuming for a moment that I made myself famous enough to buy back the Red House at Widdiford, with the strawberry beds and the apple orchards, and the old wicket-gate that leads into the back lane which takes you straight to the Parsonage—would you keep the promise that you made when you were a long-legged person of seven, with a very large appetite, and I was a chubby subject of thirteen and a half with rather thin trousers?"

"Yes, Jim, I would," said Miss Perry, with remarkable promptitude, frankness, and sincerity.

"There, now I've done it," groaned Jim. "It was bound to happen. I knew the royal daylight would provoke me to make a cad of myself before it had done playing its tricks. But if people will have yellow hair, and they will wear yellow gauntlets to match it, and that fellow upstairs will fling the limelight all over the place, how can a poor painting chap help himself?"

Miss Perry had grown very grave. She was silent for twenty-five seconds.

"Jim," said she, with slow-drawn solemnity, "if you do marry anybody, I r-r-really think it ought to be Muffin."

"That Ragamuffin!"

"She *is* such a sweet," said Miss Perry. "And she is *so* pretty; and dearest papa says she is *so* clever; and of course you know I am *rather* a Silly."

"All the world knows it."

"And Muffin always said she would just love to live at the Red House at Widdiford."

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "I am afraid you are deep. You want to marry Gobo."

"Not r-r-really," said Miss Perry, with wide-eyed earnestness. "Of course he is a dear, but—but of course, Jim, he is not like you are."

"Thank you very much for the information. But tell me, Goose Girl, wouldn't you like to be a duchess?"

"Oh no, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"Why not, you Goose?"

"It sounds rather silly."

"So it does, now you come to mention it," said Jim. "But think of all the wonderful frocks and jewels you would have, and the wonderful houses, and the wonderful horses, and the wonderful ices of every conceivable color and every possible flavor. And as for cream buns, a duchess of course can have as many as she requires."

"I would rather have the Red House at Widdiford," said Miss Perry.

"Really," said Jim, "you are the most tremendous thing in Geese. Just think what you could do if you were a duchess. You could buy old books and new vestments for your papa; Muffin could have a new mauve; the Polly Girl could marry her parson, and she could boast of her sister who married the duke; and the Milly Girl could think more about Persian kittens and less about self-improvement; and as for Dickie and Charley, they both might go to Sandhurst and probably become field-marshals."

The blue eyes of Miss Perry opened in their dazzlement to dimensions that were perfectly astonishing.

"It would be awfully nice," said she; "but, Jim——"

"Well?"

"I did promise you, didn't I?"

"You would never have got those three red-cheeked apples if you hadn't," said Jim.

As they neared the turn at Hyde Park Corner they began unconsciously to assume airs of decorum. The accusing figure of Mr. Bryant awaited them. Lord Cheriton too was only a little way off. He stood by the railings looking the picture of outraged delicacy.

When the runaways came up to greet him he held up both hands before his face with the gesture of dismay of a very nice old lady.

"I am dumb," said he.

Apparently Jim Lascelles was smitten with a similar infirmity. As for Miss Perry, the ineradicable

instincts of her sex assumed the control of that irresponsible person.

"*Have* you seen Gobo?" she demanded breathlessly.

The blend of disinterested concern and absolute innocence was perfectly charming.

"I could never have believed it," said Cheriton, with a pained air. "The finished duplicity, the Jesuitical depth."

"*Have* you seen him?" demanded Miss Perry.

"Have I seen Gobo? I have seen a roaring, outraged lion in the guise of a rampant turkey cock."

"It is an awful pity," said Miss Perry. "We missed him."

Cheriton felt that he had never observed such gravely sweet concern in the human countenance. To have suspected its proprietress of *arrière pensée* would have been barbarism.

"Yes; an awful pity," Cheriton assented. "Particularly for men of a rather full habit of body who are decidedly short in the neck."

"Do you think Gobo will mind?" said Miss Perry. "You see, Jim"—the handle of Jim's crop was ominously near to her knee—"Mr. Lascelles came up, and we thought if we went down we should be sure to meet Gobo, but we didn't."

"Lascelles, my good fellow," said his friend, "isn't it time you began to play up a bit? Miss Perry's lucidity is admirable, but somehow one has the feeling that her verisimilitude wants eking out a little. Your version will be interesting."

"My mount cost a cool half-sovereign which I couldn't afford," said Jim, brazenly, "and I thought as it was a fine morning I had better have my money's worth."

Cheriton's smile expanded to the dimensions of his necktie.

"Yes," said he, laughing, "this sort of thing is best left to those who are born with the instinct for diplomacy. Lascelles, my good fellow, you would have done far better to have pinned your faith to your companion in guilt. Her version was excellent, if a little bald. To my mind it was pitched in quite the right key. It was natural, lucid, admirably reticent. It clearly suggested that the blame could not belong to either of you, whoever else it might be fixed upon. Unfortunately, your own version does not tend to exonerate you equally. I must confess, Lascelles, that upon my mind it leaves a most unhappy impression."

"The truth is," said Jim, "I am seeking a fresh store of inspiration in order that I may complete the *chef d'œuvre*."

"I think it should be a masterpiece undoubtedly."

"I think so too," said Jim.

Miss Perry's far-seeing, west-country eyes appeared to be searching for something on the far horizon.

"Gobo is coming," said she.

"Which way?" said Jim.

"He is coming up on the right. Don't you see him?"

Jim had to strain his gaze.

"Yes; by Jove, you are right!" said he. "What wonderful eyes you have got, Miss Perry!"

"It is so long since one inhabitated the halcyon era of one's youth," said Cheriton, "that one is rather at a loss to remember whether Red Riding Hood made a similar observation to the wolf, or whether the wolf made the observation to Red Riding Hood."

"The former, undoubtedly," said Jim.

"I am glad of that," said Cheriton. "I feared it might have been the latter."

"Hadn't we better be going?" said Jim, brazenly, to his companion in guilt. "This screw of mine seems to have got his wind back."

"*Has* he, Jim?" said Miss Perry.

Jim's nondescript took a turn to the left. The chestnut followed in the most natural manner. On this occasion, however, the distance between the Parsonage and the Red House at Widdiford was not accomplished in quite such record time. All the same, for the greater part of the way the pace was decidedly hot.

"Seen anything of the gal, George?" inquired his friend Cheriton.

George was looking very purple indeed.

"I saw a cloud of dust just now," said he. "There was a ginger-haired gal in it going at a dooce of a rattle."

"I can't imagine my ward, Miss Perry, attempting anything in the nature of a rattle," said Cheriton.

"Can't you?" grunted George, sourly.

CHAPTER XVIII

FASHION COMES TO THE ACACIAS

JIM LASCELLES was inclined to view his morning as a very great success. It is true that it had cost him the last half-sovereign he had in the world, but he felt that it had been invested to full advantage. He had derived a new store of inspiration from that memorable morning. For a whole week he was sustained by the recollection of it. He gave up his days to joyous labor in the wooden erection in the Balham back garden.

" I shall make something of her after all," said he.

One morning when he came down to breakfast he found a letter at the side of his plate. This, in itself, was an event sufficiently rare, because Jim Lascelles was one of those people who never write a letter if they can possibly avoid doing so. The envelope had rather an air about it. Upon the back of it was a monogram of a distinguished club.

" What ho! " said Jim.

A pair of eyes by no means ill found in worldly wisdom had duly noted that which was on the back of the letter.

" The correspondent of dukes," said their owner. " Which of them is it, my son? "

Jim threw the contents of the envelope across the table with a gay laugh.

DEAR LASCELLES (it said),—*The art of the age seems clearly to call for the presence at the Acacias of the wonderful Miss Perry. Unless the Fates are adverse—which, according to Juvenal, they are sometimes—she will appear about 4.30 o'clock to-morrow (Tuesday) afternoon to claim in her own proper person a cup of tea, together with two lumps of sugar and one cream bun, Buszard's large size. Forgive the shortness of the notice. Our old and common friend did not develop sufficiently marked symptoms of laryngitis until this morning to submit to the decree of her medical adviser. He has ordered her to keep her bed. The accomplished Miss Burden accompanies us in an official capacity. Ponto does not.*

Sincerely yours,

CHERITON.

P.S.—Strawberries and cream are known to be very delectable.

Jim's uncommonly youthful mother was vastly amused.

"Never tell me, my son," said she, "that an extremely well-informed Providence does not watch over the destinies of even the humbler denizens of the suburb of Balham. We are to be deluged with three persons of fashion, and the Miss Champneys are sure

to pay a call—they always pay a call—this afternoon."

"Those old guys," said Jim. "I sincerely hope not."

"When will you learn, my son," said Jim's mother, "to be more respectful towards the two great ladies of our neighborhood, the real live daughters of a deceased dean?"

"I beg their pardons," said Jim, who was humbled. "I am afraid I have been getting very uncouth of late."

"The great world is so unsettling, my son. I am afraid you are already beginning to patronize a ridiculous old frump like me."

"Beginning!" said Jim.

"But remember, my son, I am determined that I will not be patronized in my own house by your friend the duke."

"Oh! he won't try to," said Jim, airily. "He's a very civil old soul, the same as you are, my dear, although his circumstances are rather better."

"I won't be patronized by that Goose either," said Jim's mother, with tremendous spirit.

"You run no danger in that quarter," said Jim. "It will be as much as ever she can do adequately to patronize the strawberries and cream."

"And who, pray, is the accomplished Miss Burden? I will not be patronized by her either."

"I won't answer for you there, señora. You might get short shift from that quarter."

"We shall see, my son," said Jim's mother, with an air almost of truculence.

The back sitting-room at the Acacias was really a very mediocre affair. It contained so little furniture that it was made to look half as large again as it actually was. The small room was cool and tasteful if, perhaps, somewhat too obviously simple and inexpensive. It contained not a single reminiscence of bygone grandeur. For one thing, the crash had been rather in the nature of a holocaust; and again, an opulent past is a poor sort of aid to a penurious present.

The walls were decorated by a blue wash and by a single picture, a study by Monsieur Gillet for his enchanting "La Dame au Gant." It had been given by that master to a young English pupil of whom he was extremely fond. It held the bare walls all by itself. Jim was a little vain about it. Then there was a little shelf of books. It comprised five novels by Turgenev, two by Stendhal, three by Anatole France, four by Meredith, three by Henry James, two volumes of Heine, the lyrics of Victor Hugo, two plays of D'Annunzio, and a volume of Baudelaire. There were two bowls of roses also, which Jim had procured for his mother in honor of the occasion.

At a quarter to four Mrs. Lascelles sat reading "Pêcheur d'Islande" for the thirteenth time. She looked very cool and dainty in a simple black dress, embellished with still simpler white muslin. Her look of youth had never been quite so aggressive; and in

Jim's opinion her wise little smile of tempered gayety was perfectly irresistible.

"My dear," said Jim, censoriously, "it is time you made a serious effort to look older."

"I do try so hard," said Mrs. Lascelles, plaintively. "This is positively the most frumpish frock I possess, and I have done my hair over my ears on purpose."

"Haven't you an older frock?" said Jim.

"This one is decidedly the elder of the two, laddie."

"How old is it?"

"Seven years."

"And what is the age of the other one?"

"It is a mere infant. It is only five."

"Then it is quite time you had a new one."

"It is not usual, I believe, for a woman to get a new dress for the purpose of making herself look older."

"But then you are a most unusual woman."

"I don't want to be unusual, laddie. I do try so hard not to be. If there is one thing I dislike more intensely than another it is an unusual woman."

"Then you are very perverse. I wonder what effect it would have if you did your hair higher."

"I will try if you like; but I know——"

"What do you know?" said Jim, sternly.

"That I never look quite so maternal as when I have it over my ears."

"Well, it's a serious matter. I look like being driven to get a new mother."

"There is a scarcity of good ones, my son."

Jim scanned the tiny sitting-room with a very critical look.

"Upon my word," said he, "that little rosewood piano and that little effort of Monsieur Gillet's are the only decent things in it."

"I am afraid we have an air of cheap gentility," said his mother. "But don't let them sneer at it. Gentility of any kind is quite an honorable aspiration."

"I wonder," said Jim, "if there is anybody in the neighborhood who would lend us a *Peerage* for the afternoon. We might stick it in the center of the room upon that little Japanese table."

The front-door bell was heard to ring.

"Too late, too late," said Mrs. Lascelles, dramatically. "The peerage has already arrived."

"It is the Miss Champneys," said Jim.

"I think not, laddie. It is only twenty past four, and it is so much more impressive to pay a call at five."

"Two to one it's the Hobson Family."

The countenance of Jim's mother assumed a look of anxiety that bordered upon the tragic.

"By all the saints and all the powers," said she, "I had quite forgotten the existence of the Hobson Family. Do you really think it can be?"

"I am perfectly sure of it," said Jim, with immense conviction. "This is an opportunity that the Hobson Family could not possibly miss."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Jim's mother, "what is to be done?"

"These things are sent to try us," said Jim, philosophically. "The Hobson Family has no other *raison d'être.*"

"Alack! alack!" gasped Jim's mother.

The little maid-of-all-work entered the room. With her prim freckled countenance and her hair, which like herself was quite unnecessarily pretty, done over a roll, she conveyed somewhat the impression of a small cat who has the furtive air of a confirmed cream stealer. Also she had the air of one who takes an immense interest in everything.

"Miss Burden," announced the little maid-of-all-work, as though it gave her great pleasure to do so. "Miss Perry. The Earl of Cheriton."

Mrs. Lascelles laid "Pêcheur d'Islande" upon the varnished boards. She rose to greet Miss Perry with an exclamation. In the circumstances it was most natural, for Miss Perry was looking neither more nor less than a goddess.

Jim's mother took a hand of Miss Perry in each of her own.

"You are too wonderful," said she. "You take away one's breath. I always predicted that you would grow up a beautiful girl; but, really, who could have expected this."

Miss Perry said nothing at first. She merely proceeded to hug Jim's mother in the traditional Widdiford manner.

Mrs. Lascelles appeared to undergo some little personal inconvenience in the process.

"You wonderful being," she gasped.

Jim presented Miss Burden to his mother with a formal and becoming gravity. There was always a veiled tenderness about the eyes of Miss Burden which to some people rendered her oddly attractive. Her air of shyness was also thought by some to be a merit.

"So sweet of you to come," said Jim's mother. She had already performed the feminine operation of falling in love with Miss Burden at first sight.

"I should also like, my dear," said Jim, with excellent gravity, "to make you and Lord Cheriton acquainted with one another. You can't think how kind he has been to me."

Jim's mother gazed demurely into the complacent and amused countenance of that peer.

"I think I ought to be able to guess," said she.

"Capital," that peer was heard to murmur with extraordinary irrelevance.

"I beg your pardon," said Jim.

"Not at all, my dear fellow," said Cheriton, in his most graciously musical manner, "not at all. I made no observation. But I should like to be allowed to make one. What remarkable sunshine for London."

"The sunshine is occasionally quite obtrusive at Balham," said Jim's mother. "Lower the sunblind a little, laddie. You will find that chair the coolest, Lord Cheriton."

It was really not necessary for Mrs. Lascelles to offer the coolest chair to Lord Cheriton. For, if the truth must be told, he looked cool enough already. It was perhaps his most assiduously cultivated and most carefully cherished characteristic. However, he took

the chair Jim's mother had indicated. He took it almost as if he were conferring homage upon it. Having chosen a likely spot upon the varnished boards upon which to set his silk hat, he proceeded to place it there with immense precision. He then crossed his lavender trousers very urbanely, displaying in the process an extremely neat and spotless pair of white gaiters. He then placed his black-rimmed eyeglass in the left or more fashionable eye, and surveyed his surroundings with a leisurely benevolence that was really most engaging.

By the time Cheriton appeared to be pleasantly settled, and by the time Mrs. Lascelles had fully recovered from the effects of Miss Perry's third hug, she said—

"Ring, laddie."

Jim obeyed. He had assumed already an air of almost unwarrantable humor.

The little maid-of-all-work entered.

"Tea, please, Miranda," said her mistress.

Miranda embellished the command of her mistress with a totally unnecessary half courtesy which she was apt to produce upon state occasions. It was a remarkably effective little affair, although its true place was undoubtedly a comic opera.

"Capital!" murmured Cheriton. And then, as a pause in the conversation seemed to give his remark a significance to which it laid no claim, he added sententiously, "weather!"

"Yes," said Jim, "capital weather."

Miss Burden addressed a remark to Jim's mother.

"Do you think the exhibition of the Royal Academy is equal to the last one?"

"I think it is better," said Mrs. Lascelles, with an air of conviction, "decidedly better, don't you?"

"That is because there is a picture by a young fellow of the name of Lascelles in it," said Jim.

"Quite a sufficient reason," said Cheriton.

"The brutes have skyed me, though," said Jim.

"Jealousy, my dear fellow," said Cheriton. "The Church, the stage, and the fine arts live in perpetual dread of the rising generation."

"That is so true, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother. "I am so glad to hear you say that. Of course it is jealousy. Those musty and stereotyped old R.A.'s are dreadfully frightened of young men with new ideas."

"Profoundly true, my dear Mrs. Lascelles; profoundly true," said Cheriton, with the deference of a courtier.

"My mother expects every one who enters this house," said Jim, aggrievedly, "to declare that I'm a genius."

"I do not find it at all hard," said Cheriton, "to obey that condition."

"People of taste never do," said Jim's mother, beaming upon my lord.

The little maid-of-all-work brought in a tea-tray and a basket of comestibles.

"Miranda," said her mistress, "if Mrs. Hobson calls, or Miss Hermia Hobson, or Miss Harriet Hob-

son, or Mr. Hobson, or Mr. Herbert Hobson, or Mr. Henry Hobson calls, I am not at home."

"Thank you, ma'am," said the little maid-of-all-work, with an air of great intelligence, and with a further display of the comic-opera courtesy.

"Sugar or lemon, Miss Burden?" said Jim's mother.

Miss Burden took sugar, a small lump. Miss Perry took two lumps, size not stated.

"I wish these cups were more sensible," said Jim's mother, with a reminiscence and an apology.

"That cup is absurd, my dear," said Jim.

Miss Perry seemed inclined to agree with Jim.

"Fetch the largest cup we have in the house, please, Miranda," said her mistress.

"Thank you so much, dear Mrs. Lascelles," said Miss Perry.

Jim handed bread and butter and strawberries. Miss Burden was content with a small slice of the former. Miss Perry was more eclectic in her patronage. Jim was then guilty of an action which his mother was forced to consider as singularly ill bred. He took up the plate of cream buns, Buszard's large size, which had been specially procured, and placed it on the chimneypiece in a very ostentatious manner. And at the same time he indulged in a classical quotation to Lord Cheriton, who laughed as though he understood it. It is possible that Miss Burden understood it also, but Mrs. Lascelles seemed a little doubtful about its meaning. As for Miss Perry, she was

perfectly frank and wholly unabashed in her abysmal ignorance.

"What *does* it mean?" she demanded, with a thrill in her voice and her azure orbs very wide.

"It means," said Jim, "it is better to contemplate from afar the rewards of virtue than to partake of them prematurely."

"A free translation, my dear fellow," said Cheriton, "creditable alike to your scholarship, your literary instinct, and your knowledge of human nature."

"But you *owe* me one, you know," said Miss Perry. "Doesn't he, Lord Cheriton?"

"I am afraid, Lascelles," said that peer, "it will be necessary to return a true bill."

Jim presented Miss Perry with one cream bun on a blue china plate.

"That spotted cake with the almonds in it is topping," said he, attempting maliciously to embarrass Miss Perry with riches. "The pastrycook who creates it has a reputation that extends as far as Upper Tooting and Streatham."

"I will try some," said Miss Perry.

Lord Cheriton took lemon with his tea, also a rusk.

"Genius is a delightful thing," said he, conversationally. "I have a genius for admiring it in others."

"One feels sure you must have," said Jim's mother, most sympathetically. "I am trying to cultivate it also. As one is the mother of a highly gifted son, one feels that one ought."

"Precisely," said Cheriton. "And may one ven-

ture to remark that you will not find the undertaking difficult?"

"Lord Cheriton," said Jim, in a tone of warning, "weigh your words carefully. My life is in danger of becoming a burden to me. As for you, señora," said Jim, sternly, "once more, and with the most marked publicity, I deny with all the vehemence of which I am capable that I am a genius."

"What, pray, is the use?" said his mother. "It is futile to deny it. Besides, even if you were not, it is not right to contradict your old mother, especially before company."

"So true," murmured the *arbiter elegantiarum* nibbling at his rusk.

Jim, however, was a young fellow with resources. He proceeded immediately to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"I am afraid, Lord Cheriton," said he, "that judgment is not my mother's strong point. You see, she is not so mature as she might be."

"I have observed it," said Cheriton.

"Her absence of judgment," said Jim, coolly, "or her absence of maturity?"

"I have observed her absence of maturity," said Cheriton, with a coolness in nowise behind the coolness of Jim.

"In my opinion," said Jim, "she is too young to be the mother of a great hulking fellow like me."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Lascelles," said my lord, with his courtier's air. "But in my humble

judgment it is a pleasant folly for a mother to err on the side of youth."

"It is a form of indiscretion not without its dangers," said Jim.

"Yes, my dear Lascelles, you are undoubtedly right there."

"This spotted cake with the almonds in it is awfully nice," said Miss Perry.

"The confection with the pink icing and the sugar-plums is generally admired at Balham," said Jim.

"I will try some," said Miss Perry. "Quite a small piece, please. I think pink icing is so nice; don't you?"

"I do," said Jim, cutting a liberal piece for two persons.

A ring was heard to proceed from the front-door bell. Mrs. Lascelles betrayed anxiety.

"I trust," said she, "our small Cerberus will prove equal to a frontal attack by the Hobson family."

"She will, unquestionably," said Jim, with an air of reassurance.

"It would be a great disappointment if she didn't," said Cheriton, "if one may venture to express a purely personal emotion."

"Why, Lord Cheriton?" said Jim's mother. Her tone was a natural blend of surprise and interest.

"A lifelong habit of minute observation," said Cheriton, "emboldens one to think that she would prove equal to anything."

Before Cheriton could suffer rebuke for holding an opinion upon such a subject, the little maid-of-all-work announced—

"Lady Charlotte Greg, Miss Champneys, Miss Laetitia Champneys."

The space of the small back sitting-room was sensibly diminished by the entrance of three tall bony women, each equally austere of feature and ponderous of manner. Each was veiled and habited in black with white facings; and although their boots were not elastic-sided, it is difficult to advance any adequate reason for their not being so fashioned.

Miss Champneys, whose manner was decidedly impressive, introduced to Jim's mother Lady Charlotte Greg, her oldest friend, who was staying with them at The Laurels for the purpose of opening the sale of work at Saint Agatha's. Lady Charlotte Greg, the daughter of a successful politician and the wife of an evangelical bishop, conveyed the right degree of distance in her greeting. And after all, when you come to think of it, the distance is very great between a tiny back sitting-room at Balham and the Palace at Marchester.

While these three very large ladies were adjusting themselves to three somewhat small chairs, and they were accepting tea from a fresh brew duly procured by the assiduous Miranda, each lifted her black veil and scrutinized her surroundings and her company with a rather ruthless directness. It always seemed to the quailing hostess of the Acacias, the Chestnuts, the Elms, or of Beaconsfield Villas, when she met that

glance that a personal apology was demanded from her.

All three ladies were unanimous in the opinion that Mrs. Lascelles' callers were overdressed. And in their opinion to be overdressed was to be guilty of one of the seven deadly sins.

"I am convinced," said Miss Laetitia Champneys, in an undertone to Lady Charlotte Greg, "that that girl in the preposterous hat with feathers is an actress."

In the opinion of Miss Laetitia Champneys for any person to be an actress was to identify one's self with the most elemental form of human degradation.

"Do you suppose I require to be told, Laetitia?" said Lady Charlotte, bridling. She felt that not only her sense of decency but also her knowledge of the world had been aspersed. "And that preposterous person with the eyeglass," added Lady Charlotte, "is, of course, an actor-manager."

Neither Miss Laetitia nor her elder sister, Miss Champneys, was quite sure what an actor-manager really was. They did know, however, that dear Charlotte was excelled by none in knowledge of the world.

Lady Charlotte, as is the way with Lady Charlottes all the world over, as the erudite inform us, put up her glasses. She proceeded to study the actor-manager, a rare species of wild fowl of which the Close of Marchester was mercifully free, in a manner which can only be described as remorseless. Yet the actor-man-

ager appeared to suffer no embarrassment. He serenely changed his black-rimmed monocle from his left eye to his right, which, if not quite so fashionable as the other one, was rather perversely endowed with better powers of vision.

CHAPTER XIX

A SOCIAL TRIUMPH

FOR almost the space of a minute a battle royal was waged between the monocle and the long-handled folders. All present, with the exception of Miss Perry, who was not in the habit of observing anything, sat in breathless silence to observe the issue. And incredible as it may appear, the issue was not with the long-handled folders.

"Capital!" murmured the victor, to nobody in particular, and for no apparent reason.

Jim Lascelles was one of those unfortunate and misguided people who have an extraordinary *flair* for what they call "fun." He bent over to his mother.

"Don't give the show away yet," said he.

"You are too cryptic, my son, for this addle-pate."

"Don't you see," said Jim. "They think our dark horse is an outsider. Had they known they wouldn't have come."

Jim's mother smiled her little half smile whose furtive mischief was really far more becoming than it ought to have been.

"When is the sale of work, Lady Charlotte?" she asked, in order to keep the pot boiling.

The simple question was received by the three ladies with hauteur. As the sale of work began on

the morrow, and Mrs. Lascelles had promised to preside over the bran tub or the refreshment stall or the rummage counter, she was not quite clear which, their demeanor was perhaps not unnatural.

"The sale of work begins to-morrow at three o'clock, Mrs. Lascelles," said Miss Champneys, coldly.

"Of course," said Jim's mother. "How stupid of me! I knew that perfectly well. What I meant to have said was, which is the day upon which Lady Charlotte will perform the opening ceremony?"

"The *first*, Mrs. Lascelles," said Miss Champneys and Miss Laetitia, speaking as one.

"Of course," said Jim's mother; and involuntarily added the rider, "how stupid of one!" The Miss Champneys were matchless in putting people in the wrong. "What I should have asked was, who will perform the ceremony on the second day?"

"The wife of the member," said Miss Champneys.

"And on the third?" asked Jim's mother, rather obviously.

"Lady Plunket," said Miss Laetitia.

"The wife of the brewer?" asked Jim.

Jim's question provoked a further display of hauteur. In the first instance it was an act of presumption for a young man like Jim to have ventured to ask a question at all, and in the second he had contrived to ask the sort of question that stamped him as belonging to the neighborhood.

"Lady Plunket was a Coxby, I believe," said Miss Champneys. She assumed an air of devastation, which was singularly becoming to one whose fore-

bears, according to their own oral and written testimony, had first appeared in these islands in the train of the Conqueror.

"Any relation to the parson chap?" inquired Cheriton, casually.

Lady Charlotte Greg again elected to do battle.

"I am informed that Lady Plunket is a niece of the late Archbishop Coxby," said she, in a tone and manner which for two decades had cowed the minor clergy of the diocese.

"Archbishop, was he?" said Cheriton. "I only knew him in his capacity of a bore."

Each of the three ladies was susceptible of a little quiver of horror.

"Pray where did *you* meet him?" demanded Lady Charlotte Greg, with dilated nostril.

"In the House," said Cheriton. "Shockin' bore in the House."

Lady Charlotte raised her glasses with studious care.

"The domestic life of Archbishop Coxby was renowned for its simplicity," said she.

A pause surcharged with suppressed emotion followed, and then the ludicrous drawl of Miss Perry was heard in the land.

"I think a sale of work is too sweet," said that Featherbrain. "We always have one once a year in the parish room at Slocum Magna."

The Miss Champneys and Lady Charlotte Greg received this announcement with a frosty disdain which, sad to relate, had not the least effect upon Miss

Perry. The fine shades of social feeling did not percolate to that obtuse person.

"That is very interesting, my dear Miss Goose," said Cheriton, in his most mellifluous manner; "very interesting indeed."

"We raised eight pounds two and ninepence for the organ fund in 1900, at Slocum Magna," drawled Miss Perry.

"Where, pray, is Slocum Magna?" inquired Lady Charlotte Greg.

Miss Perry had learned by this time that whenever Slocum Magna was mentioned in the presence of London people the question was inevitable. However, before she could take steps to enlighten Lady Charlotte Greg, Cheriton favored her with a paternal finger.

"Permit me, my dear Miss Goose," said he, elaborately. "Slocum Magna," he proceeded, with the weighty air of one who is no stranger to the Front Bench, "is the next village to Widdiford."

"And where, pray, is Widdiford?" inquired Lady Charlotte Greg.

"Widdiford," said Cheriton, meditatively, "Widdiford is the place where the Red House is and where they haven't *quite* got the railway, don't you know."

"But it is only three miles away," chimed Miss Perry.

The pause which ensued made Jim's mother and the Miss Champneys wonder what was going to happen. All three felt a little uncomfortable. On the contrary, Lady Charlotte Greg felt it to be a tribute

to the overpowering nature of her personality, and was gratified accordingly. Cheriton crossed and re-crossed his lavender trousers, and changed the glass from the right eye to the left with the air of a High Church clergyman pronouncing the benediction.

"Have you been to see the horses at the Hippodrome?" inquired the undefeated Miss Perry of Lady Charlotte Greg.

"I have not," said that lady, with a quiver of an evangelical top-knot.

"Have you?" inquired Miss Perry of the Miss Champneys.

"My sister and I have not," said the elder Miss Champneys, whose top-knot, although not quite so evangelical as Lady Charlotte's, yet contrived to quiver just as much.

"You ought," said Miss Perry, with irresistible friendliness. "They play bridge and fire off guns and pretend to be dead. I have been nine times."

The Miss Champneys conferred in discreet undertones with Lady Charlotte Greg.

"Too natural to be an actress," said that authority. "Her hair and skin bear inspection. If she were not so painfully overdressed she would be a singularly beautiful girl."

"Can you place that curiously artificial person?" asked Miss Laetitia, who had a passion for exact knowledge.

"An actor-manager unmistakably," said Infallibility with immense decision.

"Is he the father, do you suppose?" inquired the insatiable Miss Laetitia.

"Dear me, no, Laetitia. Can you not see that that girl is by way of being a lady?"

All unwittingly the hostess proceeded to deal Infallibility a blow.

"Lady Charlotte," said she, "may I introduce Lord Cheriton, an old schoolfellow of my husband's? Miss Champneys—Lord Cheriton. Miss Laetitia Champneys—Lord Cheriton. May I also introduce Miss Burden and Miss Perry? Lady Charlotte Greg—Miss Champneys, Miss Laetitia Champneys."

During the bowings and the counter bowings that ensued, Jim Lascelles seized the opportunity to say to his mother—

"You gave the dark horse away too soon, señora. There might have been fun."

"If you wish to succeed in life, my son," his mother admonished him, "never treat the peerage flippantly."

"I should like to go to-morrow to the sale of work," said Miss Perry.

"You shall, my dear Miss Goose," said Cheriton, "because I feel sure that your papa would like you to, provided that we have Lady Charlotte's assurance that there will be no harangue from Parson Coxby's daughter."

"Lady Plunket does not appear until Friday," said Lady Charlotte, by no means ungraciously, "and I only intend to say a few words myself."

The Miss Champneys were not overawed by Lord

Cheriton because they were gentlewomen born, but neither they nor the wife of the Bishop of Marchester had quite so much condescension as when they entered the little Balham sitting-room. It is trivial to dwell on these things. Self-respecting people really don't notice them—at least, they make it a point of honor to appear not to do so. But there are cynics in the world who like to lay stress upon them. Not the wife of the Bishop of Marchester alone, but the Miss Champneys also began to thaw perceptibly. And presently, for the first occasion during their intercourse, Miss Laetitia went the length of addressing Jim's mother as " dear Mrs. Lascelles."

It was a really great afternoon for Jim's mother. The Miss Champneys had never exhibited themselves in such an agreeable light. Lady Charlotte Greg also softened the first impression she had created, and contrived to be quite agreeable too. It was Miss Burden who asked of malice prepense whether they had seen Mr. Lascelles' picture at the Royal Academy. They had not, these ladies assured Miss Burden, but they would make a point of going specially to Burlington House to do so. It was Lord Cheriton, with a very direct look at Jim's mother, who mentioned Mr. Lascelles' undoubted genius.

" Of course," said Miss Laetitia, " Mr. Lascelles must have genius if he exhibits at the Royal Academy."

" It doesn't necessarily follow, Laetitia," said Lady Charlotte Greg, who felt with justice that Miss Laetitia was impinging upon her prerogative of dis-

pensing universal information. "Before now I have known quite second-rate people exhibit at the Royal Academy."

"Have you, though?" said Cheriton. "That is interesting."

"There is Mottrom," said Lady Charlotte Greg. "One finds his pictures there continually. Nothing will convince me that Mottrom is first rate. One feels one ought really to draw the line at the music of Wagner and the pictures of Mottrom."

"Capital!" said Cheriton.

The voice of Miss Perry was heard again in the land.

"Do you like the pictures of Joseph Wright of Derby?" inquired that art critic.

Jim's mother looked at Lord Cheriton, and Lord Cheriton looked at Jim's mother with great demureness.

"A police constable, was he not?" said Lady Charlotte Greg.

"Lord Cheriton knows," said Miss Perry.

"Very probably," said that authority, with the air of one to whom a great truth has presented itself unexpectedly. "To be sure, what could be more natural than Police Constable Joseph Wright of Derby?"

Jim Lascelles began to grow restless, as sensitive souls are apt to do when amateurs begin to talk "shop" for their benefit. And in his capacity of a common-sense young Englishman of athletic tastes, he felt that to call a man a genius was much the same as kicking him. Of course mothers are privi-

leged. In self-defense, however, Jim began to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"Does anybody object to Chopin?" said he.

Nobody did.

"Then you must play your little piece, my dear," said Jim, with a cool air of triumph.

Jim's mother protested, of course; and of course her six callers were unanimous in their insistence. Jim opened the little rosewood piano, and arranged the music-stool with a dual sense of satisfaction. Not only had he turned the tables effectually, but also he was genuinely proud of his mother's playing.

Jim had reason to be proud of it. Truth to tell, she played a waltz about as well as it could be played by an amateur on a cottage piano in a small back sitting-room. The ladies, with the exception of Miss Perry, rewarded her with a murmur of thanks. Miss Perry was not content with anything less than vigorous applause. Cheriton, on the contrary, was strangely silent.

"She talks about me," said Jim, triumphantly, "so I shall now talk about her. Pachmann is the only person in Europe who knows more about Chopin than she does."

"I know something about Chopin too," said Cheriton.

As he spoke all his artifice seemed to fall away from him in the oddest manner. It struck Jim all at once that his face was old and worn and tired.

"You will hardly believe," said Cheriton, in an altered voice, "where I first heard that. It was at a

little house in the Rue Saint Antoine. George Sand was living in it at that time, and Chopin brought it there and played it to us the evening he composed it. They were all there—De Musset, Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, and that weird fellow——"

"Théophile Gautier," said Jim's mother.

"Yes, Gautier. Those were great days."

Cheriton slowly uncrossed his lavender trousers, and rose with a little sigh. He closed the lid of the rosewood piano reverently.

"He was such a gentle fellow," he said quaintly. "Such a gentle fellow."

The eyes of Jim's mother looked strangely bright.

"And the Dudevant?" said she, in a soft tone. "Was she—was she an ogress?"

"No; merely a child of nature. They were all children of nature. That man had a soul."

It struck all, with the exception of Miss Perry, as quite odd that the old exquisite should replace very carefully the music-stool under the little rosewood piano. There was something incongruous about the action.

"He was such a gentle fellow," he said.

When Cheriton turned his tall and corseted form away from the piano, Jim's mother observed that his eyes looked curiously hollow and faded, and that, for all their carmine, his cheeks looked old and worn. He took Jim by the arm in his paternal manner.

"Come, my dear fellow," he said, "take us to see your masterpiece."

"One moment," said Jim, disengaging his arm.

He walked to the chimney-piece, and solemnly took up the plate of cream buns. With these in his hand he led the way through the open French window to the wooden erection in the garden. Cheriton brought up the rear of the procession, shepherding the six ladies with his usual air of excessive gallantry.

The painting-room contained merely a rug for the floor, a large and comfortable sofa with cushions, and at the far end, in a sumptuous light, the single canvas three parts complete. A dozen studies of the great subject and minor works had been tidied away.

The Miss Champneys gave vent to their admiration.

" But surely," said Lady Charlotte Greg, making great play with her glasses—" but surely this is a very fine picture."

" I am beginning to think so," said Cheriton, complacently.

" I have thought so from the first," said the mother of the artist.

" I also, dear Mrs. Lascelles," said Miss Burden.

" I wish I could have worn my fancy frock," said Miss Perry, without any suggestion of vanity. " But it is not for out of doors."

" The frock does not trouble me," said Jim. " It is that incredible hat that I am exercised about."

" Incredible hat? " said Lady Charlotte Greg.

" She wear-eth an in-cred-ible hat," said Jim.

Without preface or apology Miss Perry seated herself in the center of the sofa and assumed her pose.

"A singularly beautiful sitter," said Lady Charlotte Greg, "and singularly placable."

With an ostentation that in the circumstances was remarkable, Jim Lascelles placed the plate of cream buns on a small table at a respectful distance from the sofa.

"I must now," said Jim, courteously, "request the public to withdraw."

"Rembrandt himself could not have bettered it," said Cheriton, as he stood by the door to shepherd into the garden five irresponsible creatures who were babbling incoherent criticism of the fine arts.

By the time Miss Perry returned to the little sitting-room she had duly earned, received, and assimilated two cream buns, Buszard's large size. For her the sitting had been a decided success, and Jim Lascelles was inclined to view it in that light also. Already he had put an immense amount of labor into the picture, and he was now beginning to feel that the end was in sight. And looking at it as it grew, touching and retouching it continually, learning to treat every detail with a boldness and a delicacy of which he had hardly dared to believe himself to be capable, he could not help feeling that this work stood for growth.

Already he knew himself to be artistically thrice the stature of when it was begun. Something had been born in him. It was the culmination of seven years' single-minded and assiduous labor. Indeed, Jim Lascelles was almost beginning to realize that

some fine morning he might wake to find himself famous.

When sitter and painter returned to the house Cheriton was discovered reading "La Chartreuse de Parme" aloud to Miss Burden and Jim's mother.

"Now we must fly," said Miss Burden. "I tremble to think of what will happen."

"I shall make what apologies I can for you," said Cheriton. "I suppose we shall have to plead guilty to finding the polo at Hurlingham very absorbing."

An invitation to partake of pot-luck was declined reluctantly. Miss Burden was genuinely alarmed. However, the three distinguished visitors left the Acacias with the request that they might come again.

CHAPTER XX

MISS PERRY HAS HER PALM CROSSED WITH SILVER

MISS BURDEN was subjected to severe treatment on her return to Hill Street. She was forbidden to go to Hurlingham again during the rest of the season. The faithful gentlewoman felt very guilty. She bent her head before the torrent of abuse, which, wholly contrary to the doctor's orders, was showered upon her. All the same, Miss Burden felt herself to be privy to a romance. The visit to Balham comprised elements which compensated her for the persecution to which she was subjected.

Sir Wotherspoon Ogle, old Lady Crewkerne's medical adviser, was strongly of opinion that abuse is not good for laryngitis. But, as we already know, the arbitrary patient of that distinguished physician not only despised the clergy, but also had a poor opinion of the medical profession.

"Lady Crewkerne," Sir Wotherspoon had said, "do not speak for three days."

"Rubbish!" said that old woman, in a husky wheeze.

"I will not answer for the consequences," said Sir Wotherspoon.

"Answer for the consequences, forsooth!" said the formidable patient. "In my opinion it is time the

law was amended. The medical profession ought to be more amenable to it."

On the following morning the old lady was rather worse.

Nevertheless George Betterton called upon her for the second time during her illness, and was received in audience within the sanctity of her chamber. Yet this also was not in accordance with the advice of those who had charge of her case.

Cheriton called at half-past twelve the same morning. To him, however, access to the vicinity of the four-poster was denied. When he learned that George Betterton had been thus favored for half an hour past he assumed a grave demeanor.

"What is that man after?" he said to Miss Burden, mistrustfully. "No good, I am afraid. Yesterday it was the same. They spent an hour together as thick as thieves. And yet Caroline is unable to see her oldest friend, a disinterested adviser and sincere well-wisher."

Miss Burden could throw no light upon the mystery.

"How is she this morning?" Cheriton inquired.

"Sir Wotherspoon Ogle does not think at all well of her."

"Naturally."

"The mind is so active," said Miss Burden.

"You mean her tongue?"

"Yes, that is active too," said Miss Burden, rather dolefully.

"It is rather late in the day for her to learn to

bridle it. But if she won't, so much the worse for her."

"Sir Wotherspoon finds her a rather trying patient, I am afraid."

"If he does not," said Cheriton, "he is either less than human or he is more."

Cheriton afforded Miss Burden and Miss Perry the privilege of his society at luncheon. He proposed that they should spend the afternoon at the sale of work in aid of Saint Agatha's, Balham. Miss Perry was charmed with the idea. Miss Burden shared her delight, yet doubted sorely whether her services could be dispensed with. However, with the exercise of a little diplomacy, she learned that they could, as not only was the Duke of Brancaster returning at four o'clock, but her ladyship's lawyer also.

"Her lawyer!" exclaimed Cheriton. "What the dooce does she want with him?"

My lord seemed not a little perturbed by the coming of that ominous personage.

"I wonder if that old woman is capable of playing me a trick?" he mused.

His speculations upon this subject were many on his way to the sale of work at Balham. Considered in conjunction with the assiduity of George Betterton, the coming of the lawyer was unquestionably a sinister omen.

At the sale of work, however, Cheriton presented no sign of either mental or moral perturbation. The lavender trousers had been exchanged for an art shade of gray. The tie-pin had a pearl in it instead

of a turquoise; the waistcoat, instead of presenting a baffling and complex harmony in lilac, was of plain white piqué; and, in lieu of a gold-headed cane, he carried the famous ivory-handled umbrella, which had been repaired with such exemplary skill that it betrayed no token of the recent catastrophe at Saint Sepulchre's.

All that was best in the life of Balham and its environs was gathered at the sale of work in aid of Saint Agatha's. First and foremost was the Rector, the Reverend John Overdene Cummings, a man whom all the world delighted to honor, not for his calling only, but also for himself. His weaknesses were so few that they really do not call for mention. And among his numerous merits, perhaps that which endeared him most to all that was best in the life of Balham, was his almost exaggerated esteem for what he called "the right people." It was known by the well-informed that in the first instance it was due entirely to the Reverend John Overdene Cummings that the Miss Champneys had prevailed upon their friend Lady Charlotte Greg, to perform the opening ceremony.

Lady Charlotte Greg had just had great pleasure in declaring the sale of work open, when something in the nature of a sensation was caused by the arrival of the wonderful Miss Perry and her attendant ministers. The Assembly Rooms had been transformed into a Sicilian village. They were thronged with the youth, beauty, and fashion of the district, and also with the gay and brilliant costumes of the peasantry

of the sunny south. But there was nothing in that brilliant gathering to compare with the blue-eyed and yellow-haired young Amazon, hatted and gowned à la Gainsborough. Miss Burden felt there was not; and she, in her modest gown with lilac trimming, was not without her merit, for she too was tall, distinguished of feature, and her figure was excellent. As for Cheriton, with his glass stuck with a rather humorous insolence in his left eye, he knew there was nothing, not in Balham only, but in the whole of London, that season to compare with Caroline Crewkerne's niece. He was a proud man, and he looked it as, with pardonable ostentation, he cleared a passage for his escort down the precise center of the throng.

Jim's mother was thrilled by the apparition of the wonderful Miss Perry. She was there to preside over the refreshment stall. It was small blame to Jim that he had given up his days and nights to dreams of such magnificence. And Jim himself, who had accompanied his mother to the sale of work, more, it is to be feared, in the hope of seeing the "incredible" hat in public, than for any deep interest in the welfare of Saint Agatha's, was possessed by a strange excitement as he gazed.

"What an air the creature has!" his mother whispered to him. "I never saw anything so regal. She moves like a queen among her subjects. And yet the Goose, under her feathers, hasn't the ghost of an idea about anything in earth or heaven or in Slocum Magna."

"You forget Joseph Wright of Derby, my dear."

"The ridiculous creature!" laughed Jim's mother.

In the meantime the progress down the center of the Sicilian village was almost royal. The throng yielded on all sides. A wave of respect, amounting almost to awe, seemed to arise and pervade everything. Indeed, royalty was mentioned. For example, the Rector, with his quick eye and his sure instinct, was aroused immediately.

"Dear me," he said to Miss Laetitia Champneys in exultant tones, "I really believe it must be the Grand Duchess Olga Romanoff."

It appeared that, according to well-informed journals, a tall and splendid person answering to that name and description was then in London, who was engaged continuously in charitable endeavors.

"Oh no, Mr. Rector," said Miss Laetitia, promptly; "they are friends of ours."

A kind of daïs had been erected at the end of the Sicilian village for the accommodation of the friends of the Rector and other grandees. The distinguished visitors, although they had never seen the Rector before and had no *locus standi* whatever as far as Saint Agatha's was concerned, took a bee-line to the daïs, under the direction of Lord Cheriton. But the fact is well known that a peer of the realm feels it his duty to make straight for a platform whenever and wherever he sees one.

The Miss Champneys, whose manner in public was even more impressive than it was in private, shook hands with Lord Cheriton in most stately fashion.

Lady Charlotte's greeting was thought by close observers to be perhaps less elaborate in style, but that she shook hands at a more fashionable angle.

"Introduce me," said the Rector to Miss Laetitia.

Cheriton prided himself upon being all things to all men. His manner with the Church was agreeably distinct from what it was with Art or Letters, or Law, or the Army, or Sport, or Politics.

"Congratulate you, Mr. Rector, on the success of your bazaar," he said sonorously. "Admirable hall for the purpose. To my mind nothing is more picturesque than a Sicilian village. The costumes are so rich."

The Rector of Saint Agatha's, one of those solemn men who don't smile easily, was seen to beam in a gratified manner.

Miss Perry enjoyed herself immensely. The first thing she did was to greet Jim's mother with effusion, and also Jim. The latter, who was assiduously cultivating the commercial instinct, informed his mother that she was sure of one important customer.

"What awfully nice cakes you have!" said Miss Perry.

She had a small pink one to inaugurate the refreshment stall. Promising to return anon, she then made a tour of the Sicilian village. In the fancy bazaar, presided over by Mrs. and the Misses Hobson, she made her second purchase.

"Those bed-socks are too sweet," said Miss Perry. "I should like to buy them for dearest papa, because

his feet are always so cold in the winter. How much are they?"

"One guinea," said Miss Hermia Hobson.

"You can get them cheaper than that at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry.

"Everything at this stall is one guinea," said Miss Hermia Hobson, "except the antimacassars, and they are five, because they were out in India during the Mutiny."

"Were they indeed!" said Cheriton, taking up a very fragile and faded article; "during the Mutiny. That is most interesting."

"Don't touch them, please," said Miss Hermia Hobson. "They might easily come to pieces."

"I think dearest papa would rather have the bed-socks," said Miss Perry. "They are *too* sweet."

Cheriton gallantly disbursed the sum of one guinea.

Miss Perry's tour of the Sicilian village resulted in the acquisition of a rag-basket of a new and original pattern, which it appeared that Muffin had always wanted; a pocket-knife for Dickie; a fountain-pen for Charley; an album for Milly; a piece of lace for Polly; and a box of soldiers for the small son of Mrs. Crick who kept the post-office at Slocum Magna. A copy of "Persuasion" was purchased for Miss Burden, by the advice of Lord Cheriton; and a copy of "Law's Serious Call" for Aunt Caroline, also by the advice of that nobleman. He himself was content with an orchid, which was fixed in his button-hole by Miss Laetitia Champneys, Miss Burden holding the pin. Miss Perry had great difficulty in recon-

ciling the respective claims of a rabbit, that was able to roll its eyes and move its ears, and a box of sweetmeats. Eventually she decided in favor of the latter. All the same, she felt that the former would undoubtedly have appealed to Tobias. But it might have a tendency to make him bloodthirsty.

Afternoon tea at Mrs. Lascelles' stall, to the strains of Chicane's Orchestral Cossacks, who had been specially engaged to appear in Sicily, was a delightful function. The Rector, the Rectoress, the Miss Champneys, and Lady Charlotte Greg all came together to the refreshment stall to partake of this stimulating and delightful beverage. The verger of Saint Agatha's railed off a special table with a cord to keep the crowd from encroaching. It seemed that the Rector's theory of the Grand Duchess had been overheard, and had immediately become rife with the general public. By now it had taken such a hold that Her Yellow-haired Magnificence in the Gainsborough hat was said to be the niece of the Czar.

Cheriton had a pleasing sense of uncertainty as to whether the curiosity of the public was due to the imperious challenge of female beauty, or to the appearance and attainments of the fourth earl of that name. Being a very vain man, he was not disinclined to believe that it was the latter; therefore he sat in the enclosure sipping his tea with a superb air, and preening his plumage like a venerable cockatoo.

"He wears a wig!" a member of the public could be heard to say quite distinctly.

"Oh yes," said a second member, with an air of

information. "The Romanoffs are always short of hair. The late Czar was as bald as an egg."

After doing frank and impartial justice to the tea and confectionery, Miss Perry made her way to the Gypsy's Tent to have her palm crossed with silver.

"I see a tall dark man," said the gypsy.

"Yes," said Cheriton, "there is no doubt about him. But what about a short bald fellow, with a tendency to apoplexy and a face as red as a turkey's?"

"I don't see him at present," said the gypsy.

"Are you sure?" said Cheriton.

"I see a tall fair man who is young and handsome," said the gypsy. Jim Lascelles had just entered the tent with Miss Burden. "And I see a tall dark woman, and, yes, a short fair man, who is rich and rather stout, begins to emerge. He is old, and he appears to have been twice married——"

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Miss Burden, in a voice of awe.

"Awful rot!" said Jim Lascelles.

"Don't forget the tall dark fellow," said Cheriton.

"Yes—no—yes," said the gypsy; "and the tall dark man, and the tall fair man, and the short stout man—really, I don't remember reading a hand so complex as this."

"It was a tall fair man at Widdiford," said Miss Perry.

The gypsy discarded the hand of Miss Perry with a gesture of petulance.

"That has spoiled everything," said she.

"We were married at Widdiford," said Miss

Perry, "and we lived happily ever afterwards, and we only paid a shilling."

"I am afraid shilling fortunes are always untrustworthy," said Cheriton. "But I should like a little more information about that red-faced, apoplectic fellow."

"They might very easily marry," said the gypsy, in a sinister manner.

"Awful rot!" muttered Jim.

Cheriton appeared to think that the gypsy was confusing the short fellow with the tall dark one.

The hand of Miss Burden was found to be less complex. In her future there was only one man, and he was tall and dark.

"I think it is wonderful," said Miss Burden, with a charming vibration in her voice.

The exigencies of the case rendered an early return to Hill Street necessary. Hurlingham was already forbidden for the remainder of the season. It would not do, declared Cheriton, for Ranelagh to be prohibited as well. Otherwise they would be compelled to restrict themselves to Burlington House, to Lord's, and the Circus.

CHAPTER XXI

HIGH DIPLOMACY

OLD Lady Crewkerne's interview with her legal adviser did her no harm. Indeed she seemed to sleep the more soundly for it. All the same her condition continued to demand much skill and attention upon the part of Sir Wotherspoon Ogle. However, the diligence of that eminent physician did not go without its reward. Whatever might be the actual condition of the patient's throat, the vocal cords seemed to grow decidedly stronger, in spite of the fact that she was rigidly forbidden to use them.

"On no account, Lady Crewkerne," said Sir Wotherspoon Ogle, very gravely indeed, "and upon no consideration must you have recourse to your voice."

"Do you suppose I am fool enough to say nothing?" said the old woman, like a hoarse old raven. "If I did, you would soon have the lid on my coffin."

Sir Wotherspoon Ogle was shocked.

Cheriton made three applications for admission to the presence, yet met with refusal on each occasion. On the other hand, his rival, George Betterton, continued in high favor. However, on the occasion of the fourth attempt, a Sunday morning, he obtained the *entrée*.

The occupant of the four-poster, supported by pillows, and embellished by the head-dress and the famous Indian shawl, looked, in the opinion of her visitor, quite her old self. The eyes glittered as fiercely and as shrewdly as of yore; the curve of the nose was just as grim and hawklike as ever; while as for the resolute jaw and the thin-lipped, tightly drawn mouth, enough hard sarcasm and unflinching force of character lurked about it to quell the vast majority of human kind.

Cheriton was a fop and fribble, as all the world knew. Nevertheless, he belonged to that honorable company that is not abashed easily. He greeted the formidable occupant of the four-poster with a robustness of demeanor that served him well. Had he bated so much as an eyelid, or betrayed the least disposition to flinch, he would have received very short shrift this morning. For whatever might be Sir Wotherspoon Ogle's opinion in regard to that complex mechanism that was buttoned into the linen band of the old lady's nightgown, there can be no doubt that, considered as a whole, the aged frame had gained alarmingly in bodily vigor by a week's detention within the precincts of the four-poster.

"How are *you*, Caroline?" said Cheriton, with musical expansiveness.

"Worth a good many dead ones at present," said the old lady, with no more music than a raven.

"So I perceive," said her visitor, with a little sigh.

Upon the counterpane lay "Law's Serious Call." Cheriton took it up and ran his fingers thoughtfully

through the leaves. On the flyleaf in extremely large and decidedly juvenile characters was the inscription, "To dearest Aunt Caroline, with Fondest Love from her Affectionate Niece, Araminta."

"Caroline," said her visitor, "you are an extremely fortunate woman to have a niece who takes such a practical interest in your spiritual well-being, particularly at a time when the state of your health tends to make the future increasingly speculative."

The occupant of the four-poster poised her chin in a manner that can only be described as the incarnation of truculence. The fierce eyes flashed from under their bushy canopy with all the ruthlessness of their prime. She said nothing, however. Her silence rendered her the more formidable.

"In my humble judgment," said Cheriton, choosing his words delicately, "your affectionate niece has a charmingly frank, and at the same time a deeply spiritual nature."

"Humph!" said Miss Perry's aunt. "The creature has as much spirituality as that bedpost."

"How can you be so obtuse, Caroline?" said Cheriton, achieving a very respectable note of pathos. "There is a vein of poetic ideality in her that makes one think of Saint Catherine of Siena."

"A vein of poetic fiddlestick!" said the old lady. "She has as much ideality as Ponto has. The only thing that interests either of them is their meals. In fact, I should say that Ponto has the better soul of the two. I sometimes suspect Ponto of being an esoteric Buddhist in a reincarnation."

"Do you indeed!" said Cheriton. "Well, when Ponto presents his benefactress with a copy of 'Amiel's Journal' I shall be only too happy to think you have grounds for your suspicion."

Cheriton continued to run his fingers fondly through the pages of "Law's Serious Call."

"To my thinking," said he, "it was a singularly frank yet spiritually-minded nature that conceived the idea of presenting her aunt with a work of this character."

"The creature is as spiritually-minded as a dog ferret," croaked the occupant of the four-poster.

"A vigorous figure," said Cheriton, "yet not very happily applied. But I don't wonder, Caroline, that you are a little topsy-turvy, and that your standard of things in general has gone awry."

"Why don't you?"

Cheriton permitted himself a highly dramatic gesture. "That man," he said tragically.

"To whom do you refer?"

"I refer," said Cheriton, "to the most dangerous man in London. The turkey-faced ruffian! He would undermine the moral code of Augustine himself."

"Happily," said the occupant of the four-poster, "I am not Augustine. As far as George is concerned, I stand where I was. Yet, mark one thing, Cheriton—mark one thing fully"—the quiescent lioness paused to unfurl as it were the ominous jowl from the band of her nightgown—the figure is not a

pretty one to describe a peeress of mature years, but it seems to be the only one that can in anywise do justice to the slowly kindling flame of sarcasm that was revealing itself in the thin lips and the fierce eyes—" I have a greater respect for George at this moment than I have ever had before."

" Have you, Caroline? " said her old friend, meditatively.

He was a cool hand, but he was a little uneasy. The occupant of the four-poster marked down the suspicion of disquietude, whereas a less virile observer would not have noticed it at all.

" Yes, Cheriton," said the raven's voice. " Whatever George may be or whatever he may not be, in my opinion he is a practical man."

" Practical enough, I grant you, where his passions are concerned."

" In my judgment," said the occupant of the four-poster, " it is precisely where his passions are concerned that a man ought to be practical."

Cheriton agreed with reluctance.

" But there are people," said he, with an air of refinement, " to whom the practical pursuit of passion must always seem a repulsive undertaking."

" There are many humbugs in the world," said Caroline Crewkerne. " Personally I agree with George that passion ought to be placed upon a business basis."

Cheriton threw up his hands with a gesture of well simulated horror.

" No, Caroline," said he; " you have no soul. And

yet Ogle tells me that during the past week you have been literally walking in the Valley of the Shadow."

"Ogle is a liar," said the occupant of the four-poster. "He is thinking of his fee."

"For shame, Caroline," said Cheriton. "Out upon you and your sentiments. And you who have been so near the Abyss!"

The occupant of the four-poster gave the great head-dress a tilt. The gaze that was directed from under the bushy eyebrows was that of a sibyl.

"Cheriton," she said, "some two months ago I gave you advice in regard to your appearance. I have observed with pleasure that you have had the good sense to follow it."

It was not quite clear, to judge by Cheriton's demeanor, whether he felt that this was a legitimate cause for gratification.

"I am glad, Caroline, you find the result agreeable," said he.

"My advice was given for a particular reason, you will remember."

"Yes, Caroline, it was."

Cheriton began to speculate as to which card his old friend was going to play.

"Do you feel that you can congratulate yourself?"

"Upon what, Caroline?" said her old friend, blandly.

"You don't need to be told," said Caroline, magisterially. "All London is looking at you."

"Is it?" said Cheriton, with superb innocence. "And pray, what does it see?"

"It sees, as I do, that your behavior is of doubtful propriety."

"Does it indeed!"

"I have reason to believe that is George's opinion."

"George!" exclaimed Cheriton, with impassioned dignity. "George's opinion! I'll thank George to refrain from expressing an opinion about me or about my affairs."

"George is a man of the world, at any rate. I should call George a practical man."

"George is a presumptuous fellow," said Cheriton, with heat. "I should recommend him to refrain from meddling with my personal affairs. Let him attend to his own."

"George is quite competent to do that," said Caroline, with a suavity that her old friend felt to be decidedly dangerous. "In fact, I may say that George has already placed his affairs upon a business basis."

"What do you mean, Caroline?"

"It is not a question of what I mean," said the cryptical Caroline. "The question is, what do you mean, Cheriton?"

Cheriton allowed "Law's Serious Call" to fall upon the counterpane.

"I wish you wouldn't indulge in riddles," said he.

"There is no mystery," said Caroline. "I am going to say one thing to you quite plainly."

"You have always been inclined to err on the side of plainness, Caroline, in my opinion."

"George thinks, and I think with him, that the time is ripe for you to make a declaration of your intentions."

"My intentions!"

"Your intentions, Cheriton, in regard to my niece Miss Perry. As she has been intrusted to my care I feel that I have a right to make this demand."

During the pause which ensued the occupant of the four-poster adjusted her head-dress in much the same manner that a Lord Chief Justice might be expected to adjust his wig. Cheriton on his part assumed a port of dignified composure.

"I have no need to assure you, Caroline," said he, impressively, "that my intentions, as far as your niece Miss Perry is concerned, are honorable—in the highest degree."

"I am pleased to have your assurance, Cheriton, that that is so," said Caroline, coolly. "George appeared to take a rather pessimistic view of them."

"I will thank you, Caroline, not to quote that man to me."

"I have a greater respect for George than I have ever had before. That is why I quote him. He has recently shown himself in the light of an uncommonly astute fellow."

"Bah!" said Cheriton. "I have never disguised from myself that George would have been more successful as the proprietor of a bucket-shop than as an English gentleman."

"George is a practical man, and in my judgment, Cheriton, that is where he has the advantage of you. For in my judgment you have never been that."

"Thank you, Caroline. That is an advantage I am only too glad to concede to anybody."

"If you will take my advice, Cheriton, you won't be too ready to concede it. There is one question I intend to put to you." The occupant of the four-poster leant forward a little from under her canopy with an aspect of the most resolute sarcasm that ever adorned the human countenance. "Do you intend to marry the girl?"

The question was fired point-blank in all its ruthless directness. Cheriton had long cherished the opinion that the venerable occupant of the four-poster was the most consummate vulgarian of her time. In this he was doubtless correct, for the frank contempt which she cherished for anything "finicking" was apt to lead her into extreme courses. But even he, with all his cynicism, was not prepared for anything quite so straight from the shoulder. Therefore he gave ground a little. He was inclined to hum and haw.

"I am afraid, my dear Caroline," he said, "the answer to that question must remain entirely my affair."

"Answer me, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, her wrinkled old lips curling with sarcasm. "Do you intend to marry my niece?"

Cheriton abated his glance. He took the glass from

his eye and examined it critically. He shifted his feet a little. He then replaced the glass carefully and stuck his hands under his frock coat.

"Yes, Caroline, I do," he said, with admirable composure.

"Very good, Cheriton," said the occupant of the four-poster, with ominous pleasantness. "I feel it to be my duty to inform you that George does also."

The blow was planted with all the skill of which the occupant of the four-poster was capable. Cheriton, however, had had time to foresee it. Therefore, although unable to evade the force of it, he received it staunchly.

"But that is impossible, Caroline," he said, with a superb assumption of indifference.

"Why impossible?" said the occupant of the four-poster, with the amiability of one who holds the whole game in her hand.

"The most ill-assorted pair in England," said Cheriton, gravely. "The incongruity of their tastes, the dissimilarity of their appearance, their disparity in years."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton."

"It is far from coxcombry, I assure you, Caroline," said Cheriton, plaintively. "A ravishing creature like that to marry a mere simulacrum like George. I shudder. The idea is horrible. It revolts me."

"Don't behave like a coxcomb, Cheriton. George is quite as eligible as you are. In my estimation he is the more eligible of the two."

"Upon my word, Caroline."

"Socially, of course, George is the more important."

"I take leave to doubt it."

"Do be practical, Cheriton."

"In my humble judgment, Caroline, a first-rate earl is of more account than a second-rate duke."

"A matter of opinion, Cheriton," said the occupant of the four-poster, "in more senses than one. Then, again, I am glad to be able to state that George has already put the matter upon a business basis."

"Revolting."

"Coxcombry."

"What do you mean precisely by a business basis?"

"I am happy to be able to state that George has made a definite offer."

"To the girl?"

"Certainly not, Cheriton. Have you no sense of decency? And I may say that as far as it goes the offer is a tolerably good one."

"Marriage? You are quite sure that George means marriage?"

"Yes, Cheriton, he means marriage," said the occupant of the four-poster, with her "hanging-judge" demeanor.

"I can only say," said Cheriton, "that such conduct is very unlike him. I yield to none, Caroline, in whole-hearted admiration of your niece, Miss Perry, considered æsthetically and as a work of nature, but

you must not forget that she has not a sou, and she is of no particular family."

The occupant of the four-poster breathed blood and fire.

"She is a Wargrave," said she.

"On the distaff side."

"It is more than good enough for either of you."

"Matter of opinion, Caroline, matter of opinion," said Cheriton, musically.

"Your patent dates from a land-jobbing lawyer in the days of George the Second," said the occupant of the four-poster, whose head-dress was performing surprising feats. "As for the Bettertons—who, pray, are the Bettertons?"

"A truce to family pride," said Cheriton, mellifluously. "Let us get on with the business. I should be glad to know precisely what that sordid-minded ruffian has offered."

"A settlement is, of course, a *sine quâ non*."

"I fail to understand why it should be, seeing that the girl herself has not a penny."

"There are always two points of view, Cheriton. And in my judgment the creature's destitute condition renders a settlement the more imperative."

"But one may suppose you are prepared to do something, Caroline!" said Cheriton, with a severely businesslike air that was not quite in harmony with his former altruistic bearing. "You are dooced rich, you know; you have not a soul to leave your money to; and you can't take it with you."

"As far as aspirants to my niece's hand are con-

cerned," said Caroline Crewkerne, "my intentions in regard to her do not enter into the case. It is their intentions that are important. George has made a *bona-fide* offer. Do you propose to better it?"

"What is George's offer?"

"George is prepared," said Caroline Crewkerne, who, in spite of her "laryngitis," spoke with wonderful clearness, "to make an ante-nuptial settlement upon my niece, Miss Perry, of five thousand a year and the dower house at Godalming."

Cheriton appeared to yield a little.

"Have you that in writing, Caroline?" said he.

"I have. It is in the hands of my lawyer."

"If I may, I should like very much to see it."

"You will see nothing, Cheriton. The question, as far as it affects you, is, are you prepared to better George's offer?"

"It is so unlike George," said the incredulous Cheriton, "that one can hardly bring one's self to believe that he made it. He has treated none of his other women in that way."

"Doubtless they had nobody who knew how to handle him," said the occupant of the four-poster, with a chuckle of grim satisfaction.

"Yes, Caroline, you have a good head," sighed my lord. "A dooced good head."

"Are you prepared, Cheriton, to better George's offer?"

"It wants thinking over," said that idealist, thoughtfully.

The old woman's upper lip took its famous and

terrible double curl, while her head-dress seemed to erect itself into a veritable panoply of grim derision.

"Yes, Cheriton," said she, "think it over. I will give you a week."

"Say a fortnight."

"A week. A fortnight would not be fair to George."

Mr. Marchbanks entered on tip-toe.

"Sir Wotherspoon Ogle, my lady."

The negotiations were curtailed by the entrance of the eminent physician.

"How pleasant it is to see you looking so much improved," said Sir Wotherspoon. "Complete rest of mind and body have done wonders for you."

"Humph!" said the occupant of the four-poster, ungraciously.

"'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do,'" Cheriton reflected as he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXII

A CONVERSATION AT WARD'S

CHERITON was a good deal perturbed. He felt that the conduct of Caroline Crewkerne bore a perilous resemblance to the pointing at one of a loaded pistol. He had a constitutional objection to doing things under compulsion or in a hurry. He would greatly have preferred that his sentiments in regard to Miss Perry should have been permitted to ripen at their leisure. Let nature take her course. Why force the fine flower of altruism, or encumber it with the coarser growths which sprang from a sordid and grasping materialism?

His admiration for Miss Perry was immense. That, however, he shared with many people. Her success had been a feature of the season. Cheriton was in no sense a modest man, and he could not help feeling that much of it was due to his brilliantly effective stage management. Certainly his zeal for Miss Perry's advancement had been largely inspired by vanity. From the first he had taken her under his wing; and a great deal of the world's applause had been addressed to him personally on the strength of his "discovery."

He was somewhat advanced in years, certainly, to think of marriage. But he had always felt that

sooner or later he would inevitably take that course. He was urged thereto by a number of considerations. And now that the time had come when it was necessary that he should know his own mind, he really felt that he had a very genuine regard for Miss Perry.

The mere act of walking down Bond Street with her attracted an amount of notice that he was not accustomed to claim in his own person. Nevertheless, he liked it immensely. And even if commanding beauty and an unique personality did not suffice in themselves, the fact that a powerful rival was in the field was enough to stimulate his altruism in the highest degree.

He was fully determined not to be cut out by a man like George Betterton. That was the decision which braced his faculties as he sauntered down to his club to read the newspapers. From the first he had had a lurking suspicion that George meant business; but unless Caroline played him false, and his cause was already forsworn, he felt that he would prove more than a match for that by no means agile man of affairs.

Could he count upon Caroline Crewkerne? It was a thorny question for the altruist to present to himself. So intimately was he acquainted with the instinctive mental processes of that difficult old woman that he was quite sure he could not count upon her unless he could advance some very definite reason for her good-will. If he wanted Miss Perry, one thing was clear. He must prove himself the superior *parti.*

On the surface, Cheriton was as vain a man as any to be found in London. But his coxcombry was a superficial growth, assiduously cultivated, to hide the uncommonly shrewd and cool calculator who lurked beneath. Not everybody knew that, but Caroline Crewkerne did. Her dictum of "Cheriton is no fool" was her way of expressing that he was really very much the contrary. And in her heart she respected him accordingly. No one despised a fool more heartily than she did. As far as she could, she dealt exclusively with people who knew how many beans made five. There was a certain amount of honor to be gained in overreaching them.

"George is a dooced dangerous fellow," mused the altruist, on the way to his club. "He is a big-wig in his second-rate sort of way, with his Garter and his money. He is the sort of fellow to demoralize a woman. And if he wants a penniless parson's daughter he can afford to marry her. Unless that old heathen is lying—and she is capable of anything—I shall have to keep my eye on the target. As long as there is good manhood left in the country, that ruffian shall not marry our adorable Goose."

As he formulated this ultimatum the *preux chevalier* turned the corner of Saint James's Street. Seated in the bow window of Ward's was the object of these reflections. He was reading *Horse and Hound*. From a distance Cheriton marked him with the air of a satyr.

"There he is," he muttered cheerfully. "He's got the head of a rocking-horse, thank God!"

Seen in profile, George's pouched, purple face, his ungainly jowl, his loose cheeks, and his bald head, without exactly meriting the strictures to which their owner had been exposed, yet bore a kind of wooden stupidity which gave grounds for the portrait.

Cheriton, having observed that none of his fellow-members were within earshot, advanced to the recess with an air of *bonhomie* that was totally lost upon George, who was not in the least susceptible to casual external influences.

"How are you, George?" he said heartily.

"Pooty well for an old 'un," said George, with the rough geniality he extended to everybody.

"I hope you are quite free of the old trouble?" said Cheriton, solicitously.

"Free as I ever shall be," said George.

"As I haven't seen you about lately I was beginning to fear that you were laid up again."

"No," said George; and then, like the consummate blunderer he was, he fell into the trap. "Why, he said, "didn't I see you at Hill Street yesterday?"

"Hill Street!" said Cheriton, with an air of complete innocence. "You might have seen me, but I didn't see you."

"You were there, anyhow," said George, "and so was I."

"Were you?" said his friend. "Then why the dooce didn't I see you?"

"I remember now," said George. "I called round to see Caroline Crewkerne, and you called too, but she

thought you had better not come up, as the two of us might prove too much for her."

"She erred on the side of caution, my dear fellow. Two and twenty like you and me would not prove too much for that old woman."

"No, I dare say," said George, with a grunt of approbation. "How is she this morning?"

"Getting stronger by degrees. In my opinion, if that old woman is kept in bed much longer she will wreck the premises."

"Remarkably vigorous mind for a woman of her age."

"Her mind, in my humble judgment, is much too vigorous for one of her years," said Cheriton, with the air of one who imparts a profound truth to an intellectual equal. "In my opinion, Caroline Crewkerne is a rather embarrassing phenomenon. She has the education of a Whig, and the instincts of a Jesuit."

"I dare say," grunted George, who felt that Cheriton, as usual, was becoming tedious. He showed a marked inclination to resume the study of the prices made at Tattersall's the week before last. Cheriton's next remark, however, did something to recapture his interest.

"You remember that gal of hers, that niece?" said Cheriton, speaking in a rather aggrieved tone.

"Ye-es," said George, heavily, but with attention. "Gal with the ginger hair."

"Well, now, George," said his old friend, impressively, "I am going to tell you something."

Cheriton looked round the room to make quite sure that none of his fellow-members were within hearing.

"When that gal came to London a few weeks ago," said he, "she arrived at Hill Street in a turn-out that any self-respecting butter-woman would disdain to go to market in. She was the most untutored child of nature that I ever saw in the house of a Christian."

George nodded to show that he was following the course of his friend's narrative.

"Well, Caroline was furious. You know, I dare say, the circumstances in which the gal came to Hill Street. Mind you, I don't disguise the fact that her coming there at all was highly creditable to Caroline. In the course of a forty years' acquaintance, it is the only spontaneous act of charity in which I have known her indulge. But when she saw the untutored creature that had been sent to her from the heart of Exmoor, she wanted to send her packing. However, with infinite difficulty, I managed to dissuade her. Her people are as poor as mice, as, of course, you know. Father a parson, who has to bring up a long family on forty pound a year."

"Ye-es," said George, nodding.

"Knowing the gal's circumstances," his friend continued, "I thought it would be only right to give her a chance. But Caroline was all for sending her home again. And then I made the discovery that the rustic parson's daughter was by way of being a throwback to her grandmother Dorset. Well, George, what do you think I did?"

"No idea," said George.

"I got hold, my dear fellow, of Duprez, the Paris milliner, and Pélissier, the woman from the bonnet shop in Grafton Street, and between us we turned out that gal a very tolerable imitation of Grandmother Dorset. And as I had a genuine interest in the gal for her own sake, for she is a very nice simple gal, I took her about to let her see something of London, so that she might get a few ideas about things in general."

"Ye-es," said George.

"You see, my dear fellow, what I said to Caroline was this." Cheriton again looked about him to discover the proximity of his fellow-members, and assumed a very confidential air. "'With a bit of luck, and if you can play your cards as well as you used to, that gal might marry. She hasn't a penny, of course, and she is of no particular family, but she is not at all a bad style of gal when she has on a pretty frock. In fact, Caroline,' I said, 'in my opinion she is just the sort of gal to catch a brewer or a stockholder or one of these new men with money.'"

"Ye-es," said George.

"And now, my dear fellow," said his friend, more confidentially than ever, "what do you think that old Jesuit does? I put it to you, George."

"No idea," said George.

"Finding the gal has not gone off as she ought, she turns round on me."

"You!" said George, with stolid surprise.

"Yes, my dear fellow, turns round on me, and has

the effrontery to expect me—me, George—to marry her."

George gave a chuckle.

"What do you say to that, my dear fellow? Cool, eh?"

George turned over a page of *Horse and Hound* with a preternatural appearance of gravity. Apparently he was not at all conscious that Cheriton was scrutinizing him narrowly.

"What do you say to it?"

"Well," said George, slowly and heavily, "I should say you were asking for it."

It must be confessed that Cheriton was baffled. For, both in the manner and in the matter of the rejoinder, no portion of George's feelings was visible.

"Asking for it!" said Cheriton, with virtuous indignation. "Upon my word, George, I expected better things of you! To say the least, it is a poor encouragement to a good heart."

"Well, you know, Cheriton," said George, with a genial grunt and addressing himself to *Horse and Hound* in earnest, "you might do worse. Ginger-haired gal is not bad-lookin'!"

There was nothing more to be got out of George. Not only did Tattersall's sale list prove of absorbing interest, but fellow-members began to encroach upon the privacy of the bow window. Among these was the bullet-headed marquis from Yorkshire.

"Give you a good sermon, Kendal?" said Cheriton, nodding affably.

"No," said the marquis, slowly and with decision. "Too much up in the air for my taste."

"Up in the air!" said Cheriton. "I am surprised to hear you say that. I thought every parson in Europe had abandoned the up-in-the-air theory. They say the kingdom of heaven is within you these days, don't they?"

"Yes," said the marquis, gravely, "and in my opinion and in the opinion of Maria they are making a great error."

"Indigestion probably," said Cheriton, with a little shrug, and taking up the *Figaro*. "But if you will have your cooks from Yorkshire!"

"By the way," said Kendal, "I was told this morning that Caroline Crewkerne was not expected to recover."

"I am able to contradict that rumor," said Cheriton.

"Glad to hear it," said Kendal. "Caroline is one of the old standards."

"A survivor of a darker age," said Cheriton.

"I see that little bay horse of yours made a hundred and forty guineas," said George, from behind *Horse and Hound*.

"Yes," said Kendal, "and was worth more."

"Why did you part with him?"

"He tried to bite Priscilla."

"Vice?"

"No, only playful."

"Talking of Priscilla," said Cheriton, "has that young chap painted her yet?"

"No," said Kendal. "Maria has a fancy for Halpin."

Cheriton shook his head sagely.

"You are making a mistake," said he.

"Halpin is a good man, ain't he?"

"Halpin is Halpin, of course; but this young fellow Lascelles is the coming man. He has done a wonderful portrait of Caroline Crewkerne's niece."

The marquis laughed in the broad Yorkshire manner.

"I suppose, Cheriton," said he, "we must congratulate you."

George laid down *Horse and Hound*. Cheriton, who seemed far more preoccupied with George's behavior than with Kendal's question, favored the former with a gesture of humorous despair.

"I believe," said he to Kendal, "that you regular churchgoers go to church mainly to keep abreast of the times."

"Well, there's no denying," said Kendal, with a wink at George, "that we do not contrive to do that."

"Well, my dear fellow," said Cheriton, "there is such a thing as you regular churchgoers getting a little in front of the times."

"People seem to think she is the most beautiful girl in England," said the marquis. "Priscilla is very jealous."

"If I were half as handsome as Priscilla," said Cheriton, discreetly—for personal beauty was certainly not Priscilla's strong point—"I should not be jealous of a poor parson's daughter."

"Funny cattle, y'know," said Kendal, with an air of wisdom. "You young bachelors have got that to find out. What do you say, George?"

George, whose experience of the sex was extensive and peculiar, gave a grunt of ponderous solemnity.

"Anyhow," said Cheriton, in the bounty of his heart, "Lascelles is your man. Tell the wife I say so."

When Cheriton came to reflect upon George's attitude, that is, as far as his prescience could discern it, he felt that the position of affairs called for less decisive action than Caroline Crewkerne had indicated. His interview with her that morning, however, had the effect of crystallizing his ideas. He had now definitely made up his mind that George Betterton should not marry Miss Perry.

CHAPTER XXIII

MUFFIN MAKES HER APPEARANCE AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE

IT was now July, and in spite of Goodwood, and Lord's, and a constant succession of parties, Miss Perry remained faithful in her allegiance to the Acacias. Her attendance at the wooden structure in the small Balham back garden was not absolutely necessary, because the picture was in quite an advanced stage, but there can be no question that her presence was a great aid to the artist. As a rule, Lord Cheriton conceived it to be his duty to accompany her on these pilgrimages. With that disinterested benevolence, for which he was well known, he feared lest the mazes of traffic in which the vast metropolis abounded should overwhelm that ingenuous but charming child of nature. And further, he seemed to find Mrs. Lascelles a singularly agreeable woman.

While the great things of art were toward across the garden, Mrs. Lascelles and Lord Cheriton would sit in the tiny drawing-room with the French window open to the grass plot, and the fierceness of the obtrusive Balham sunshine mitigated by a sunblind, striped green and red. Here in a couple of wicker-

work chairs with ingenious arrangements for the feet they could recline, with half an eye upon the wooden structure at the other side of the lawn, where the wonderful Miss Perry was just visible in *chiaroscuro* through the open door. They discoursed of the great days when Cheriton was a younger son, and at the Embassy at Paris, and used to wear a stripe down the leg of his trousers.

The world was younger in those days, and giants lived in it. That fellow Gautier, who used to swagger at the play in a coat of plum-colored velvet and a yellow dicky; and the dandies, the poets, the painters, the musicians, the men in politics and diplomacy, the gay, careless, brilliant, cosmopolitan company that thronged the French capital before the Fall—yes, those were the days to live in and to remember! But where were they now? Where were the snows of the year before last?

Let us drink of the cup, for we know not what the morrow holds for us, was the burden of Cheriton's reflections. He had seen the great hulking beslobbered Germans at Versailles in '71, and he had seen the mutilated city after peace.

"War is so *bête*," said he. "And everything is that makes us unhappy. I don't believe that any fragrant thing ever sprang out of misery. All the things we live for are wrought of happiness. I am sure, Mrs. Lascelles, it gave you great pleasure to write the first chapter of your novel."

Jim's mother smiled charmingly. She had been prevailed upon to read her simple and unpretending

narrative of life as she saw it, which could find no publisher, because "there was not enough in it" for the public taste.

"We must respect the public," said Cheriton. "And of course we must respect those who diagnose its need. But what a joy it must have been to you to compose your little prelude to, shall I say, the works of Stendhal!"

"Mon pauvre Arrigo Beyle!" said Jim's mother, with a little blush of pleasure that was really very becoming.

There was a perceptible movement in the wooden structure. A form, divinely tall and divinely fair, appeared upon the grass plot. It was accompanied by a stalwart, velvet-coated cavalier.

"A short interval for strawberries and cream," said Jim.

"Most rational, my dear Lascelles," said the lazily musical voice of his patron from the depths of his wicker chair, "and most proper. As I was observing to your accomplished mother, the great things of art require an atmosphere of natural and spontaneous gladness in which to get themselves created. Strawberries and cream, by all means. Do not spare that national delicacy if you wish to get a final and consummate glow upon your masterpiece."

The attention of Miss Perry was wholly diverted by the rich display of the national delicacy in question upon the tea-table.

"Aren't they beauties?" said she, in thrilling tones. "I am sure Muffin has picked the largest in

the garden; and when I wrote to her, I specially told her not to."

"Among the select but ever-widening circle of persons," said Cheriton, "whom I desire to meet in the Elysian Fields, my dear Miss Goose, is your sister, Muffin."

"She is too sweet," said Miss Perry. "Aren't they beauties? I am sure you would like her so much."

After some liberal and copious refreshment—the afternoon was indeed very hot—Miss Perry and Jim Lascelles returned to the service of art. Jim's mother was prevailed upon to open the little rosewood piano. This time she played Brahms. Her touch, in the opinion of her listener, was deliciously sensitive. She promised to accompany him on the Friday following to the Opera to hear Calvé in *La Bohème*. They discussed the theaters, and waxed enthusiastic over the artless witchery of Duse as Mirandola.

"And soon, my dear Mrs. Lascelles," said Cheriton, with his paternal air, "I suppose you will be off to the sea."

"Yes," said Jim's mother, hopefully, "if the little study of the Tuscan woman in the field of olives finds a purchaser."

"One feels sure it will," said Cheriton, with perhaps a better grounded optimism.

Cheriton was justified of it, however. Jim Lascelles contrived a few days later to sell that not specially significant little work for forty pounds. In his own judgment, and in that of others, this sum was every penny of what it was worth. It was so

obviously a picture in which he was seeking to find the right way in that carelessly happy era before the right way had come to him so miraculously.

The sale of the Tuscan woman in the field of olives was curiously providential coming when it did, for Jim himself had abandoned all hope of the sea for that year. Yet neither he nor his mother was really surprised that a corner was found for her in one of the lesser reception rooms at Cheriton House.

"It is a great bargain," said Jim's mother. "Really she is worth so much more."

"A modest fiver represents her merits," said Jim, who was without illusions upon the subject.

Nevertheless Jim and his mother proposed to spend a whole month in Normandy upon the proceeds of the sale. Cheriton, who had inherited a certain quantity of suppressed gout along with the ancestral acres, made his annual pilgrimage to Harrogate to drink the waters; and the Hill Street *ménage* was removed to a dilapidated fortress in Wales. And it was to this retreat, by a signal act of grace, of which few would have suspected its authoress to be capable, that Muffin was summoned from Slocum Magna to spend a fortnight with her sister, "who, all things considered, had been a good girl."

Miss Perry wept large round tears of delight when she communicated this glad news to Tobias. That stay of her solitude had, by the guilty connivance of Miss Burden, been provided during the second week of his sojourn in the vast metropolis with a more

hygienic and commodious structure than a wicker basket.

Muffin arrived at Pen-y-Gros Castle on a sultry August afternoon, in a somewhat antiquated fly which took an hour to come from the railway station at a place called Dwygyfy, or words to that effect. It appeared that the train was due to arrive at that center of civilization at seven o'clock the previous evening, but for some mysterious reason did not arrive there until the next day. At least, according to Muffin's thrilling narrative of her adventures upon the Cambrian railway, she had found herself at a quarter to eleven the previous night at a place called Llan-something, where they have the mountains, with only four shillings and ninepence in her chain purse, together with a return ticket from Dwygyfy, and a canary in a wicker cage, which she had brought from Slocum Magna for Aunt Caroline.

However, "All's well that ends well," as Shakespeare says. Muffin accepted the situation in the philosophical spirit for which she had already acquired a reputation. She curled herself upon three chairs in the first-class waiting-room at the railway station at Llan-something, with Polly's luggage basket for her pillow and the canary by her side, and she awoke just in time to catch the train to Dwygyfy about noon the next day.

Muffin's hair was not quite so yellow as her sister's. Her eyes were not quite so blue; her appetite was not quite so big; her physique not quite so stupendous. Nor was her drawl quite so ridiculous; she was not

quite such a "silly"; but her nature was equally docile and responsive. When Muffin arrived in triumph, wearing her wonderful adventures like a heroine in a romance, Aunt Caroline was in her boudoir. In a former and more warlike epoch it had been the armory, but it was now transformed by the art of Waring and Maple into a most comfortable sanctuary where an old *dévote* could tell her beads. Not that the occupant of the boudoir was thus engaged, when Miss Perry led her sister proudly by the hand, canary and all, into the presence of her august and formidable relation.

"Aunt Caroline, this is Muffin!" announced that Featherbrain, breathlessly. "Isn't she a sweet?"

Aunt Caroline put up her glass in her time-honored manner. But there was something about Muffin that disarmed her. Whether it was Muffin herself, or her famous mauve, which, although in its third season, and decidedly rumpled owing to long exposure on the Cambrian railway, was certainly very becoming, or whether it was the canary, or her charming docility, or her candor and simplicity, it would be wrong to say positively, but Aunt Caroline accepted the present and a most cordial embrace in the spirit in which they were proffered.

"I have brought you this, Aunt Caroline," said Muffin, "because you have been so kind to Araminta, and because it is so dear of you to have me."

"Thank you, my dear," said Aunt Caroline.

Aunt Caroline actually said, "My dear!"

Certainly it may have been that a recent illness

had lowered her vitality; yet it is hard to believe that that can have been really the case, for she was still a very resolute minded old lady. But Miss Burden was amazed that she should permit herself such an unparalleled license of expression. Ponto was also. Indeed, he appeared to resent it, for he sat up and looked daggers at the canary. Dogs are so jealous, pugs particularly.

In every way Muffin's fortnight was a great success. She took the frankest pleasure in ascending mountains, bestriding waterfalls, in leaping chasms, in descending precipices, and in tearing her frock on the slightest possible pretext. Not her mauve, of course. The *pièce de résistance* of her extremely limited wardrobe was kept in reserve for high days and holy days. But she gave up the golden hours to the sheer delight of soaking her shoes and stockings in sloughs and mud and watercourses which an unerring instinct enabled her to discover in the most unlikely places; in rending her garments—second best, of course, so they really did not matter—in tearing her fingers upon briars and boulders and furze-bushes; and in using the brand new straw the general outfitter at Slocum Magna had supplied her with for the sum of one shilling and elevenpence halfpenny—there is only one price for straw hats at Slocum Magna provided you pay cash—to convey rare ferns and *recherché* specimens of the fauna and flora of the neighborhood.

Muffin was a singularly learned creature. She could tell you who was the lawful owner of the pink

egg with brown spots, or the gray egg with cream ones. She could point out the tracks of the weasel; she could discern where a squirrel lurked among the foliage when the ordinary person would have been baffled completely. She was familiar with the habits and appearance of the stoat. Every tree and bush enabled her to unfold her knowledge. Not only did it embrace all the objects in nature, but also she had a passion for collecting every wayside flower and every herb that grew.

Her store of information and her desire for its acquisition were not confined to dry land merely. In the numerous rills and small lakes in which the mountains abounded she spent many choice hours. Sometimes she removed her shoes and stockings; sometimes she did not. It depended upon whether she happened to remember that she was wearing these encumbrances before wading in in search of trout or minnows or mere botanical knowledge. However, as became a natural leader of fashion at Slocum Magna, she generally contrived in some sort to kilt her dress.

In all undertakings of this character, whether by flood or field, Muffin was pre-eminent. But it must be said that her sister Goose was a very willing, assiduous, and by no means inefficient lieutenant. Of course one so accomplished as Muffin despised her attainments really. For instance, she was never absolutely clear as to which was a weasel and which was a stoat, and whether a plover made a whirr with its wing like a partridge, and which kind of fish it was that herons cared for most particularly; but

Goose, although rather a "silly," was full to the brim with zeal and docility. Docility was, indeed, her great characteristic. She was incapable of questioning the most arbitrary command of her natural superior.

Elizabeth was Muffin's name in baptism, and that, of course, was the name Aunt Caroline called her by. From the moment of her arrival, as you have seen, her august relation relented towards her. Why she should have done so baffled all who had an expert knowledge of the character of that old woman. Perhaps she felt instinctively that there was something in Elizabeth. If that was the case, her instinct did not lead her astray.

There was certainly no guile in Muffin. But she had a way with her. She was a very handsome girl too, although whether she was of the style to take the town, as her sister had done, is perhaps a matter for conjecture. But for some reason Aunt Caroline took to her from the beginning. She even deigned on fine mornings to accompany Elizabeth into the woods which enfolded Pen-y-Gros Castle on every side, walking quite nimbly with the aid of her stick, and with Ponto waddling beside her. She would endure Elizabeth's discourse upon the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field; and she would even go to the length of carrying personally the specimens Elizabeth selected of the flora of the district. And the manner in which Elizabeth navigated the lake at the foot of the mountains, or the stream at the back of the castle, filled her with amusement.

Two days before the fortnight was at an end Aunt Caroline did a thing without precedent. She actually invited Muffin to stay a fortnight longer. Muffin crowed with delight when she received the invitation. She adored her sister Goose for one thing. Each had brought up the other, and neither had a thought which the other did not share. And in her fearless and impulsive way Muffin had formed in her own mind an ardently idealist picture of her formidable relation. And neither good report nor ill could possibly disturb it.

"The girl has sense, Burden," said Aunt Caroline, on the day the edict was issued that Elizabeth was to remain a fortnight longer at Pen-y-Gros Castle. "She appears to favor me much more than she does Polly. I think George Betterton ought to see her. Bring me some ink and a pen with a broad point."

There and then this old lady of ripe years composed a letter for the benefit of the Duke of Brancaster in a hand that was remarkably firm and full of character.

Pen-y-Gros Castle, North Wales, 25 August, 190—

DEAR GEORGE,—*If you are returned from Homburg, come and spend a week-end here. Wales is looking very well just now, and the lake is full of trout. I should like you to have your revenge at piquet.*

Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

CAROLINE CREWKERNE.

No sooner had this letter been composed than the Fates themselves began to take an active interest in affairs. The air in that particular corner of the Welsh Principality became charged with magnetism.

The letter to George Betterton had scarcely been posted an hour when a communication bearing the Harrogate postmark was delivered to the Countess of Crewkerne, Pen-y-Gros Castle. It said—

MY DEAR CAROLINE,—*Having effected my annual cure, and feeling in consequence immeasurably the better able in mind and body to cope with the things of this world, I have proposed to myself to spend the week-end with you in your Welsh fastness. You will be interested to learn that I have given a certain matter the most anxious and careful consideration, which I do not need to remind you is demanded by its highly critical nature. I am now in a position to make a definite offer, provided there has been no foreclosure.*

I remain, my dear Caroline,
Always yours, CHERITON.

Having read this letter twice very carefully, the recipient proceeded to tear it up into small pieces. There was a dangerous light in her eye.

"Humph!" said she, ominously. "I am not sure, Cheriton, that you have not overstayed your market."

All the same, the second communication did not appear wholly to displease the person to whom it was addressed.

CHAPTER XXIV

EPISODE OF A FRENCH NOVEL AND A RED UMBRELLA

IT was in the middle of the afternoon of Saturday that Cheriton arrived at Pen-y-Gros Castle by the station fly from Dwygyfy. George Betterton had arrived at the same hour the previous afternoon, and by the same medium of travel. Cheriton was received by his hostess without any excess of cordiality. Her demeanor implied that any person of either sex who presumed to try a fall with her did so at his or her peril.

The other members of the party were in the woods, and after Cheriton had taken some slight refreshment, the August evening being extremely beautiful, Miss Burden and he went to join them. The party consisted merely of George Betterton, the wonderful Miss Perry, and the accomplished Miss Elizabeth. Miss Burden had been enjoined strictly beforehand not to disclose the presence of either of the newcomers.

"How is our delectable Miss Goose?" said Cheriton, poetically. "Transformed, I am sure, into a woodland creature or a spirit of the mountains."

Three or four hundred yards along the wooded

path which led from the Castle to the wild hills was a shallow lake. It was formed by a number of tiny streams that trickled down from the mountains. Small wonder was it to find that an artist had erected his easel in this picturesque place. It was indeed an ideal spot, in which nature attained to great majesty and perfection, and the August evening matched it. Hardly a cloud ringed the noble head of Gwydr in the middle distance.

A glance in passing at the artist's canvas rendered it clear to Cheriton and Miss Burden that the painter was not really so much absorbed in the scenery as he ought to have been. It seemed that a youthful, yellow-haired, blue-eyed nymph, whose physical proportions were yet not exactly those of a fairy, was standing barefooted in the lake. Her dress, which was torn in at least twenty-four places, was kilted up just out of reach of the water. In one hand she held a collection of the fauna and flora of Lake Dwygy; by means of the other she was seeking diligently to add to their number. The yellow hair was tumbled all about her extremely frank and sunburnt countenance. The sleeves of a sorely rent and bedraggled garment were tucked up to the elbows; and a remarkably characteristic form of headgear, preserving the outward appearance of a cucumber basket, sagged about her ears in a preposterously becoming manner.

Cheriton was a rather short-sighted man. Therefore he is to be excused for falling into a natural error.

"A naiad, I perceive," said he, with his great air.

Muffin was by no means abashed by the courtliness of my lord. She made a sort of courtesy, which had quite an eighteenth-century savor about it in its quaintness, its dignity, its grace, and its simplicity. Unfortunately, however, the performance of it involved the hem of her garments in the watery element.

"I am Muffin," said she, as though she took a simple pride in that fact. "Did you think I was Goose?"

"A thousand pardons, my dear Miss Muffin," said Cheriton, although it was tolerably clear that neither Miss Muffin nor himself felt that an apology was demanded by the circumstances.

"They call me Muffin, you know," said that artless person, wringing the water out of her skirts with wonderful insouciance. "But my name is Elizabeth, really. And you are Lord Something, are you not?"

"My name is Cheriton," said that nobleman. He scrutinized the naiad with a cool and complacent glance.

"It is so dear of you," said she, "to be so good to Goose."

"My dear young lady!"

"Lord Cheriton is so good to everybody," said a pleasant and manly voice. "But, unfortunately, he is ruining my picture."

Cheriton turned to confront Jim Lascelles.

"Why, Lascelles, my dear fellow," said he, "what

right have you here? Your place is in Normandy with your mother."

"She is here," said Jim. "We came on Wednesday."

"Either this is a very singular coincidence," said Cheriton, "or you are making uncommonly rapid strides in your art."

"Coincidence it is not," said Jim. "We spent three delightful weeks in Normandy, and then the scenery began to get flat and the people primitive and angular. And as Borrow says that there are mountains in Wales, and that its inhabitants are noted for their picturesqueness, we really felt that a week here would not be wasted."

"Lascelles," said his patron, gravely, "I shall not live to see it, but it is increasingly clear to my mind that one day you will be president of the Royal Academy."

"My mother appears to think so," said Jim, modestly.

That lady was to be seen coming round the lake towards the easel. She picked her way from stone to stone in the daintiest manner, for quagmires abounded. Jim felt quite proud of her, she looked so admirable in her cool, green frock. She carried a French novel and a red umbrella. No sooner did Muffin observe her than she gave a crow of pleasure and waded forth to meet her.

Cheriton's gaze was long and particular.

"Upon my word," said he, "they appear to grow goddesses at Slocum Magna."

"And the vicinity," said Jim.

"Certainly, my dear fellow; certainly the vicinity. We take that for granted."

The greeting of Jim's mother was extremely cordial.

"This is indeed an unlooked-for pleasure," said Cheriton.

"Am I to be censured," said Jim's mother, "for urging my gifted son to follow the bent of his genius?"

"By no means," said Cheriton. "If he really felt that the Welsh mountains and their picturesque inhabitants were calling him, it is most right. Velasquez would not have been Velasquez had he not obeyed the call to Italy."

"I blame that Goose," said Jim's mother, severely. "She must write to say that they had got Muffin at Pen-y-Gros, as well as the mountains. He gave up painting his Normandy peasant girls on the day he received the letter."

"May I ask one question, Miss Muffin?" said Cheriton. "Have you brought your mauve?"

"Oh yes," said Muffin. "But it is not good for water."

"I presume," said Cheriton, "that water is not good for it."

Muffin proceeded to wring a little more moisture out of her nether garments. She gave them an additional kilt, and began to come ashore.

"Keep in," said Jim Lascelles, in a tone that brooked no denial. "Keep those Foot Pieces covered or you will ruin everything."

"Mrs. Lascelles," said Cheriton, "I seem to remember that you have a natural eye for scenery. I think I remarked it when you read the second chapter of your novel. Unfortunately, my own powers of vision are so limited that I am not always able to detect good scenery when I meet it. Those tall things are mountains, are they not?"

"Yes, I think we have the authority of Borrow that they are," said Mrs. Lascelles.

"Capital," said Cheriton, "and, as I am afraid our presence here interferes with the nice conduct of a masterpiece, do you mind showing me how to walk upon them? It is reckoned a good thing, I believe, for one to be able to say one has walked upon the mountains."

Accompanied by the French novel and the red umbrella, Cheriton picked his way along the margin of Lake Dwygy in patent leathers with box-cloth uppers. It was a beauteous evening, calm and free. Not a sound was to be heard except the muffled murmur of the tiny wavelets washing the pebbles upon which they walked. Occasionally, they heard the call of a wood pigeon from the dense black mass behind them, embowering the hamlet of Pen-y-Gros. Once Mrs. Lascelles thought she detected the pipe of the curlew. Facing them was the gigantic Gwydr, with the August sunset beginning to peer over his shoulder. His majesty was crowned with a glory that was older than he.

The naiad and the painter's easel were hidden now by a bend of the lake. They were out of sight and

out of hearing too. The red umbrella rested on a large and smooth piece of slate, raised in such a manner that it formed an ideal seat for two persons. The two admirers of nature's majesty were gazing around them at the immensity of things. Neither spoke for a little while. It may have been awe that enfolded them; on the contrary, it may have been a slight fatigue. For at least all experience tends to teach that French novels, red umbrellas, and patent leather boots with box-cloth uppers are more susceptible to the latter emotion than they are to the former. Still, it is not to be controverted that Cheriton sighed profoundly.

"If I were that fellow Rousseau," said he, "I think I should want to sit down and write something."

"Doubtless you would have done so," said the custodian of the red umbrella, "had you been Rousseau."

She sat down with her French novel on the smaller half of the fragment of slate. She looked deliciously cool and trim in her green linen frock, embellished by a hat with a wide brim, which a Breton peasant woman had plaited for her the summer before last. It had a piece of blue *crêpe* twisted round it. Did she know that she was looking well, or had she really persuaded herself that she was wholly absorbed in high thoughts about nature?

"Or were you Wordsworth you would feel the same, possibly," said the fair inhabitant of the green frock.

Pour encourager milor? Well, really, who can

say? The emotions of a French novel, a red umbrella, and a green linen frock with a twist of blue *crêpe* are so complex. Nature is complex also. There was Gwydr straight before them with the sun dying upon his left shoulder. His lesser brethren were already veiled in shadow. The lake had the luster of a dark jewel; the sky was opal; and scarcely two hundred paces distant, behind that line of boulders, the great things of art were toward.

Although the wearer of the patent-leather boots with box-cloth uppers was neither Rousseau nor Wordsworth, he sat down gracefully upon the larger half of the slate, after dusting it carefully with a yellow silk handkerchief.

"Yes," said he, "had I been Rousseau I should have sat here indubitably and have written about nature. But had I been Wordsworth I should have sat here and thought about nature. There is a difference."

Jim's mother agreed that there was.

"I wonder," said she, "if nature holds an opinion about us? When one finds her like this one feels that she must be indifferent to everything."

"That weird fellow Gautier might have agreed with you," said Cheriton, "and, to my mind, he had a good head. 'Ouf!' he used to say, 'nature reminds me of your Shakespeare. Every day she makes a new masterpiece. And then she says, Ouf! it doesn't interest me, and she makes another.'"

"Heedless of its destiny!"

"Rightly, I think. A masterpiece can always take care of itself. Can you guess what Gautier would have done had he sat here?"

"Smoked a cigarette," said Jim's mother.

"Precisely. He was so rational. Will you try one?"

Cheriton offered his case.

"I will, with pleasure, if you will try one of these," said the wearer of the green frock, producing her own cigarette case. "They are not so expensive as yours, but they will be better for you."

"*Pourquoi?* One finds it so hard to accept the less expensive things in life."

"If one grows too much of a Sybarite," said Jim's mother, taking a sententious puff of her Egyptian cigarette, "one is apt to lose one's touch."

"That is so true," said Cheriton, with a display of feeling that seemed almost unnecessary. "The only really unhappy man I ever knew was a chap who had the misfortune to ruin his palate with old brandy."

There would have been silence had it not been for the rooks. Jim's mother again thought she detected the pipe of the curlew. The sun had dipped a little closer to Gwydr's shoulder.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mrs. Lascelles."

Jim's mother started perceptibly.

"I was thinking," she said—"I was thinking about my son."

"I had guessed it."

"Really!"

"Yes, you looked so maternal. In the true sense,

of course. There was such a spirituality in your eyes, if I may so express myself."

"I am so anxious about his future," said she, removing her cigarette from her lips with simplicity and with solicitude. As she did this, Cheriton took occasion to observe that her eyes were gray. Strictly speaking, her face did not obey the regular canons of beauty. Her features were a little haphazard. But it was a face admirable alike for sense and for animation. Cheriton, who plumed himself upon being something of a connoisseur of the human countenance, felt that there was a great deal in it.

"Why anxious?" said he. "His future can take care of itself."

"I will tell you something, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother, with great earnestness, "if I may."

"I am overwhelmed with honor."

"There is a wretched girl." There was a look of dismay in eyes that were admirably gray and solicitous.

"The dooce!" said my lord.

"He can think of nothing else, and really I don't know what will be the end of it."

"Do you approve of her?" When all was said, Cheriton considered perfect practicality to be his most eminent virtue.

"She is too far away. It would not be fair to her. I am afraid I have been weak and foolish." Feminine humility is always pleasant to some people. "You see, she meant so much to my son that at first I had not the courage to look the facts in the face. And

now that at last I have done so I fear it is too late to repair the mischief."

"The mischief!" said Cheriton, cocking his ears at the word.

"He has asked the girl to marry him, you know, and she has consented."

"Capital."

"No, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother, with a little catch in her voice; "it is far from being that. It is not in the least right that she should marry him. It is not in the least right that he should have asked her."

In some subtle way, so fine are the gradations of vanity, Cheriton felt himself to be honored by the grave vehemence of Jim's mother. Her tone was almost tragic. Had the gray eyes been accustomed to the use of tears there is little doubt they would have shed them. She continued to honor this parcel of vanities with her maternal confidence.

"I smiled at first," she continued. "I am afraid I encouraged him a little. I felt it might help his art."

"Ah!" murmured Cheriton, with his eyeglass fixed upon Gwydr.

"I didn't realize the danger."

"Ah, you should," said Cheriton, looking at Gwydr most sagaciously. "One is ready to believe that the art of our young friend was helped amazingly; but then, unfortunately, *l'art c'est l'homme*."

"I have been so wicked," said Jim's mother.

"Imprudent, shall we say?" said Cheriton, with a

paternal glance at the picture of attractive distress that was seated beside him. "You toyed with a barrel of gunpowder and a lighted torch, and you found them combustible."

"They are hopelessly in love," said Jim's mother, miserably.

"The dooce! Both of 'em?"

"She is quite as bad as he. Girls are such stupid creatures."

"I have always found them so," said Cheriton.

"The wretched creature ought to have seen from the first that a struggling artist who lives with his old mother at Balham cannot possibly marry her."

"Why not?"

"Her prospects are so splendid," said Jim's mother, vehemently.

Cheriton assumed his gravest air.

"My dear Mrs. Lascelles," said he, "do you assure me seriously that the splendid nature of the young lady's prospects renders her unfit for your son?"

"Oh no," said Jim's mother; "I would not say that exactly. That is——"

"Precisely," said Cheriton. "That is the point I wished to elucidate. It seemed to me so painfully unmaternal that a woman and a mother should consider a girl too good for her son. My dear Mrs. Lascelles, if you will condescend to heed the advice of an amateur you will see that your son marries her. If girls will be so stupid they must take the consequences."

"Do you really think I ought?"

"You know you ought, Mrs. Lascelles," said Cheriton, almost sternly. "And you know that you will. It is the least that a woman and a mother can do."

The mother of Jim Lascelles sighed deeply.

"Yes, Lord Cheriton," said she, "I am afraid you are right."

The gray eyes were fixed upon Gwydr. But Gwydr appeared to frown upon them.

How long Jim's mother and Lord Cheriton sat on the round slab of slate by the marge of Lake Dwygy is not really material to this history. But the sun was drooping lower upon the left shoulder of Gwydr, and the shadows were creeping down from the formidable chasm of the Devil's Footstool and across the black tinted water. Around a buttress of rock a punt glided into view. It was propelled by a pole and contained two persons.

The foremost of these, who stood in the bows manipulating the pole, was a blue-eyed and yellow-haired Amazon, bare-armed and bareheaded. Her cheeks were gay with color, her lips with laughter. Untrammeled freedom and the joy of living were to be discerned in every line of her ample person. Beside her was a Homburg hat with a Guards' ribbon.

"That fellow!" said the male occupant of the slab of slate.

Clearly the apparition of the hat was not expected by the author of the exclamation. Also it was unwelcome to him if his tone and demeanor truly reflected his feelings. George came ashore, as becomes a man of nine-and-fifty, with an ample sense of re-

sponsibility. He handed Miss Perry out of the punt with an air of ceremony, and insisted upon being allowed to affix the boat to its moorings. He then proceeded to take a survey of nature in her magnificence and her immensity. Then he gazed up at the daughter of nature who appeared to be modeled on very similar lines.

"By the way," said he, "what time is dinner?"

"It isn't until half-past eight," said a drawl which had a mournful music of its own. "Isn't it late?"

"That man is a barbarian," said a voice in the ear of Mrs. Lascelles.

"And what of the other one?" inquired she.

"She is a goddess."

"Then I am afraid," said Mrs. Lascelles, with conviction, "that she is a barbarian also. I never heard of a goddess who wasn't."

It appeared there were things in the punt. Notably, a rod and tackle and a basket containing a very tolerable capture of trout.

"What beauties!" said Miss Perry, as she came ashore with the basket. "If I run with them straight to the cook, perhaps we might have some for dinner."

Miss Perry, who was surprisingly fleet of foot, was proceeding to put this design into execution when she came full upon Mrs. Lascelles and Lord Cheriton. The unexpected presence of the latter appeared to afford her great pleasure.

"It is so nice that you have come," said she, with slow breathlessness. "Muffin is here. *Have* you seen

her? Isn't she a sweet? And aren't these trout beauties? Gobo caught seven and I caught two. I will just run with them to the cook, and then I will find Muffin."

Before Cheriton could find an opportunity to reply fittingly, Miss Perry passed on to Pen-y-Gros Castle in the manner of a heavy-footed yet distinctly fast-moving whirlwind.

"The ridiculous creature," said Jim's mother, with a laugh.

"It seems to me," said Cheriton, "that our wonderful Miss Perry develops now she is in her native element."

George Betterton, having moored the punt, came up along the pebbles. He carried the rod and tackle. His tread was heavy, and, owing to his recent exertions, he was blowing like a grampus. He seemed to accept the presence of Cheriton as a natural corollary. They greeted one another with the reserve which among their countrymen is held to be the guarantee of a genuine character.

"Fine evenin'," said George.

"Fine evening," said Cheriton.

"For fish," said Jim's mother. "They appear to have bitten beautifully."

"Caught fourteen," said George, almost with animation. "If they average an ounce, they average two pound apiece."

"I understood Miss Perry to say you had caught nine," said Mrs. Lascelles.

"Fourteen," said George, with the resolute air of a

man who does not brook contradiction. "Where's the gal got to?"

"Little Miss Tucker desires trout for her supper," said Cheriton. "There she goes. Leaps the boulders like a chamois, by gad!"

"I tell you what, Cheriton," said George, "that gal can handle a punt with the best of 'em. She knows how to throw a fly too. Very sure hand. Uncommonly clever gal at fishin'."

"You surprise me," said Cheriton. "Three minnows in a net one would expect to be the limit of her talent in the delicate art of Piscator."

"There is a dear little trout stream behind the Parsonage at Slocum Magna," said Mrs. Lascelles, demurely.

"Seen her sister, Cheriton?" inquired George. "They call her Crumpet. Smart young gal."

"*Muffin*, my dear fellow, *Muffin*," said his friend, in a tone of pained expostulation.

"Smart as paint," said George, with a perilous approach to enthusiasm. "Makes her own flies and tackle, and can find as much bait in a quarter of an hour as will last for a week."

"The merits of a good upbringing," said Cheriton, rising from the slab of slate, "are not easily to be overestimated."

Mrs. Lascelles also rose. All three strolled by the margin of the lake until they came upon the easel. Jim Lascelles was assiduously utilizing what remained of the daylight. There was still a glow about Gwydr's left shoulder which was reflected upon the

canvas. Muffin was seated on the pebbles, complacently putting on her shoes and stockings.

"Did you catch anything?" she demanded of the bearer of the rod and tackle.

"Sixteen," said that sportsman, robustly.

"How splendid! *Do* let me see them."

"You will have to wait until dinner, my dear," said George. "They have gone to the pot."

"Good progress, Lascelles?" inquired Cheriton, conducting an amused examination of Jim's labors.

"I think I have done a good day's work," said Jim, packing up his tools.

"Yes, I think you have. I must have the refusal of it for Cheriton House. By the way, have you heard anything from my friend Kendal?"

"I am to go to Yorkshire in the autumn to paint Lady Priscilla."

"Excellent! And remember, if Kendal is to respect you, your price must be not a penny less than five hundred guineas."

As the party turned away from the lake, a dryad emerged from the wood, breathless and bareheaded. She had three trout in a basket.

"It will be all right," she announced. "We shall have them for dinner. There are six, one apiece for everybody except Ponto, and Miss Burden thinks trout are not good for him. And I've brought three for you, dear Mrs. Lascelles."

"Then you are a very noble girl," said Jim's mother, "and I highly appreciate your act of self-sacrifice."

By this time Muffin had resumed her shoes and stockings and had risen from the pebbles. Her sister took her by the hand and led her forward with an air of the most admirable simplicity.

"Lord Cheriton," said she, "this is Muffin."

"I am already honored," said my lord, "by an acquaintance which I shall strive to cultivate."

CHAPTER XXV

PARIS ON MOUNT IDA

MISS PERRY insisted on conducting Jim and his mother to their lodgings, which were at a small cottage in Pen-y-Gros hamlet. She was afraid they might get lost in the wood. Jim's mother took the trout within, while Jim conducted Miss Perry back to the gate of Pen-y-Gros Castle. It seemed that he was haunted with the fear that in the gloom she might take the wrong turning.

The Wargrave coat-of-arms was engraved on a stone pillar at the castle entrance. They leaned against it. The evening shadows were fast blotting out Gwydr and his brethren.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, mournfully, "we are in pretty deep water, you and I, aren't we?"

"It will be all right, Jim," said Miss Perry, cheerfully. "You are sure to get rich painting all these pictures. It is a splendid idea to paint Muffin. Her picture will be worth a lot of money. And I am sure, when you are rich, Aunt Caroline will let me marry you."

Jim shook his head sorrowfully.

"Chaps don't often get rich at my trade," said he; "and when they do, they don't do it all at once. Now suppose, Goose Girl, I did not get rich. Sup-

pose I was only just able to rub along just as I do now, what would you say then?"

"I should like it all the better," said Miss Perry, with conviction, "because then I shouldn't have to have a maid. A maid loses her temper, you know, if you put things in your hat, or you get much mud on your frock, or you get up too early."

"But don't you see, you Goose," said Jim, "that you have such grand prospects, and that it would be such a great thing for the family if you married a swell."

"Would it, Jim?" said Miss Perry, reluctantly.

"Of course it would, you Goose."

Miss Perry indulged in silence and reflection.

"Perhaps you are right, Jim," said she. "And if I did you would be able to marry Muffin, and that would be *ever* so much nicer for you."

Jim gave an exclamation of impatience.

"Who wants to marry Muffin, you great Goose?" said he.

"But, Jim," said Miss Perry, gravely, "she is such a——"

"Never mind what she is," said Jim. "I have my own opinion about her. I want to marry you, and I mean to."

In spite of the proximity of the Wargrave coat-of-arms, Jim Lascelles thereupon behaved in a very imperious and heedless manner. He encircled the ample form of Miss Perry, and kissed her with great boldness. As no resistance was forthcoming, he repeated the operation.

"You great Goose," said he.

Whether in the continued absence of resistance Jim Lascelles would have persisted in this behavior, it is hardly right to conjecture; for at this moment there came an interruption. A small, round quadruped came waddling through the gate of Pen-y-Gros Castle. His tail was curled up in a most cynical manner, and, with eyes swollen with baked meats, he gazed about him with the insolence of a feudal lord.

"Aunt Caroline," whispered Miss Perry. Doubtless there was guilt on her conscience. She drew herself in very close to the pillar.

"She wouldn't come out in the dusk," said Jim. "It is only Ponto taking the air to get an appetite for dinner."

Jim picked up a pebble, and, taking exact and careful aim, dropped it on the supercilious nose of that overfed quadruped.

"Now, Goose Girl," said Jim, "it is time you went up to dress, or you'll get none of those trout."

This timely reminder caused Miss Perry to flee. It was twenty minutes past eight; Aunt Caroline brooked no delay, and Fanchette hated to hurry.

Jim walked back sadly to his nocturnal chop. Why was he so poor? Why had he not more firmness of character? He felt that the part he was playing was an unworthy one. He had no right to be in Wales at all. He was merely acting the part of the spoil-sport.

However, the person most concerned by no means intended to have his sport spoiled by anybody. In

any case, he felt quite competent to conduct his suit to a successful issue. He had made the tedious journey to Pen-y-Gros Castle expressly for the purpose.

It is true that the unexpected presence of George Betterton was a little disquieting. Some six weeks had elapsed since their Sunday morning conversation at Ward's. The opinion he had then formed of the temperature of George's affections had had a marked influence on his subsequent conduct. In the opinion of this cool and shrewd calculator, George was a decoy put up by Caroline Crewkerne to lure him into the mesh.

All the same, it was a dangerous view to take. And if George had had the skill to mask his intentions, George would win the prize. Frankly, he did not think George had the skill requisite to such tactics. He was one of those plain fellows whom a child might read. Superficial observers of the Kendal type were always apt to jump far too quickly to conclusions. Quite a number of these had given the prize to George already. But Cheriton counted upon a more intimate knowledge. George was a plain, solid Conservative who, when it came to the point, would think twice before making a duchess of a parson's penniless daughter.

Nevertheless, when he took in the wonderful Miss Perry, who, in spite of all that Fanchette could do, had kept dinner waiting ten minutes, he was rather inclined to feel that he had incurred an unwarrantable risk for the mere pleasure of indulging his natural vein of cynicism. George was rather boastful

about the trout, which were delicious. And at the same time he waxed enthusiastic over Miss Perry's conduct of the punt, her manner of casting a fly; and he declared she could hook and play a fish with anybody.

"That is most interesting, my dear George," said Cheriton. "But all this merely confirms the opinion I have long since formed of her sex."

"I should like to see her with salmon," said George. "I should like to see her on Nalloch Water."

"Muffin is *ever* so much better than I am," said Miss Perry.

"She must come too," said George.

"Yes, I think it is all right," murmured his watchful adversary, with a little sigh. "I think the old duffer is to be trusted."

Yet was he? Throughout the whole dinner the problem loomed before him. Doubtless it was the conduct of Caroline Crewkerne, in combination with the guilt upon his conscience that precipitated his uneasiness. That old woman had assumed a demeanor of concentrated scornfulness which even she had never surpassed. And to make things worse, she was continually putting forth sinister hints and indulging in sardonic little touches which unmistakably were aimed at his self-security.

There could be no doubt that Caroline Crewkerne was a bad one to cross. And further, there could be no doubt that she bitterly resented what she called "Cheriton's tactics." In the first place, he had committed the unpardonable offense of seeing through

and making light of her devices. It required a very bold person indeed to do that.

After dinner Araminta and Elizabeth played billiards, while their elders were set to cards. Caroline Crewkerne had developed a talent for bridge, which, considering her advanced age, was surprising, Miss Burden also was learning to play very well, although it is true that she suffered from a cardinal weakness. Her reluctance to declare "no trumps" was due to something in her character, and, in the opinion of Cheriton, who was her partner as a rule, it was a great handicap in life. When it was George's turn to be "dummy," he invariably fell asleep, and before the game could proceed he had to be roused forcibly.

Caroline Crewkerne was one of those vigilant and seasoned warriors who are not very particular what time they go to bed. Therefore Cheriton counted upon being able to conduct a transaction that night which at the first opportunity he was determined to bring to a point. In this he was well within his reckoning, for Caroline Crewkerne and he easily sat out the others. It was about a quarter to eleven when George drank his final whisky and mineral water, and in a condition of impending somnolence went to his repose.

"Now, Caroline," said Cheriton, in an extremely businesslike manner, "let us settle this thing one way or the other. We have been toying with it long enough."

"What thing do you refer to, Cheriton?" in-

quired that accomplished dissembler, who merely asked the question as a matter of form.

"The future of our delectable Miss Goose. Now, Caroline, I want you to be practical. Be practical, Caroline, and I foresee no difficulty."

Caroline assumed her hanging-judge demeanor. She snuffed the air as a statesmanlike preliminary. Cheriton, however, a seasoned warrior, was not to be disconcerted by little things like these.

"Now, Caroline," said he, coolly, "no one appreciates more fully than I do the honorable character of your motives. Your first wish and your last is to do your duty by your delectable niece."

"Don't use so many words, Cheriton," said Caroline, sharply. "Remember you are not wasting the time of the country, but of a private individual. I don't need any reminder from you to do my duty by the girl."

"Of course not, Caroline," said the mellifluous Cheriton. "But I don't want you to get your idea of duty unduly inflated. I want you to be reasonable. I am prepared to marry the gal—she is a sweet, good, and healthy creature, and, on the mother's side, she will pass muster—but she is in no sense a *partie;* and perhaps I shall be forgiven if I feel that Cheriton House has a right to expect one."

"Let it," said Caroline, grimly.

"Forgive my adopting the language of a tradesman," said Cheriton, harmoniously; "but I feel that you will experience less difficulty in understanding it. As I say, I like the girl, and I am prepared to make

what in the circumstances is a good offer. You are at liberty to reject it, of course; but frankly I don't think you can expect a better."

"Don't be too sure about it, Cheriton," said Caroline, with a hawklike glint from under the bushy eyebrows.

"Oh, but I am," said Cheriton, confidently. "George is a bad hat."

"What do you mean?" said Caroline, sitting very upright.

"You can lead a horse to water," said Cheriton, "but you can't make him drink."

Caroline sat with her hands clenched in her lap, the picture of suppressed fury.

"Would it surprise you to learn," said she, "that George Betterton has made her an offer of marriage?"

"Yes," said Cheriton, "it would indeed. Either he was in his cups when he made it, or he has since repented of his indiscretion. George is going to marry Priscilla L'Estrange."

"What is your authority for that statement?" demanded Caroline, warily, for she had a very audacious gaze fixed upon her.

"The authority of my intuitive perception."

"Intuitive fiddlestick!"

"I know George nearly as well as I know you," said the audacious suitor. "Had George intended to gobble at the cherry, he would have done so six weeks ago, during your untimely attack of laryngitis. But George is an old hand; and although it takes a

seasoned campaigner to marry Priscilla L'Estrange, it is better that he should do so, as far as 216, Piccadilly, is concerned, than that he should marry the penniless daughter of a country parson."

With shame and trepidation and searching of heart be it written that this couple of elderly worldlings sat into the small hours of the morning discussing the pros and cons of the case in a most indelicate manner, and with a disposition to haggle like a pair of Jews at an auction. The bickering and the bartering of these two elderly persons were enough to overthrow the most resolute idealist among us.

There can be no question that the greater share of the blame belonged to Caroline Crewkerne. Cheriton, who knew her as well as he knew his alphabet, was really far more liberal-minded than she was. He was quite as shrewd also. For all the pretension of this old woman's trappings, and her lofty airs, and her contempt for all outside the magic circle—and she reserved to herself the exclusive right to perform the geometrical feat of drawing it—at heart she was ruthlessly *bourgeoise.* Indeed, she was apt to plume herself upon that quality, which, however, she preferred to call by another name. Therefore who shall blame Cheriton for his pious determination to give her a Roland for an Oliver?

Caroline Crewkerne was far better endowed with the goods of this world than many people think a private citizen has a right to be. She was a rich old woman, and, like so many rich old women, she was grasping. Cheriton was rich also, but, for all his

cynical airs, his culture was liberal enough to forbid his making a god of his money. However, he was never averse from a battle of wits. If it was freely spiced with a frank contempt for the polite conventional glosses which he delighted to mock, so much the better.

Cheriton's chief desire, apart from the state of his emotions, was to read his old friend a lesson. He knew that she had tried her hardest to overreach him. Not, of course, on her own behalf, but for the amateur's sheer love of performing that action. He had had the wit to defend himself successfully, and now he must see if he could not make her pay for her devices. He was perfectly willing to marry Miss Perry, and, prior to so doing, he was prepared to settle a certain sum upon her. But at the same time, he made it a point that something fixed and definite must be forthcoming from the other side.

It was that rock which sundered them finally at two o'clock in the morning. When this condition was first laid down, Caroline Crewkerne laughed to scorn "the insolent proposal," as she called it. In the presence, however, of Cheriton's extreme imperturbability, which none knew better how to assume when he chose, she grew gradually cooler, until at two o'clock she brought herself to say that, "without pledging herself to anything, she would consider it more fully, and, if necessary, she would take the advice of those who had had more experience in these matters."

They parted amicably, and, it is to be feared, with a renewed respect for one another. They had fought

many shrewd battles of one kind or another—over cards, over politics, over a flagrant job, over a third person's reputation, over a sale of shares; in fact, over everything except religion. It was their cheerful custom to expect no quarter and to give none. But at the same time, they bore no malice.

As Cheriton bore his candle up the ghostly stone-flagged staircase, with suits of armor grinning at him and mediæval weapons menacing him from the walls, and the young moon peering at him through the oriel windows, he knew that his old adversary would make a last final and consummate effort to entangle George Betterton. And if she succeeded, the United Kingdom would not contain a happier old woman than she.

Outside the first door in the corridor was a pair of shoes. They were rather large. Outside the next door was another pair, far less fashionable in design, yet in size precisely similar. Cheriton stood a moment to gaze reflectively from one pair to the other.

"I shall risk it," he mused. "George won't rise now. But it is rather a pity both of 'em are so dooced handy with a rod and tackle."

"Cheriton," said a grim voice behind him, "do you know of what you remind me?"

"Paris on Mount Ida?"

"No," said Caroline Crewkerne. "You remind me of a fox outside a poultry-yard, looking for a hole in the fence."

Cheriton shook his head protestingly.

"A curiously banal figure," said he. "Why are

you always so *bourgeoise*, Caroline? You have no need to be."

Caroline shook her head also.

"Cheriton," said she, with great resolution, "I don't believe a word you have told me about Priscilla L'Estrange."

CHAPTER XXVI

JIM LASCELLES ADDS HEROISM TO HIS OTHER FINE QUALITIES

FOUR hours later saw the inception of an imperial August day. The previous night Muffin had entered Goose's chamber by stealth, with bare feet and clad in a white nightgown only, and armed with a fat bolster. After a solemn exchange of civilities, of which Muffin invariably got the worst, because Goose's aim was wonderfully accurate and she was not susceptible to the most tremendous buffets, they ended as usual by sharing the same bed and going to sleep in one another's arms. It was never their custom to heed anything else until the light of the morning touched their eyelids. As a general rule it touched Muffin's first. It then became the duty of that active spirit, as soon as she realized that she was awake, to hale the still sleeping Goose out of bed. Sometimes, when even this herculean labor had been accomplished, she had to beat that somnolent person about the head with a pillow before she could be induced to put on her stockings. This morning provided no exception to the regular mode of procedure.

The mists were still gathered about Lake Dwygy,

and little was to be seen of Gwydr and his brethren, when, hand-in-hand, Goose and Muffin came trampling the dew of the early August day. Bareheaded, laughing, blithe as the winged inhabitants of the air, they were supremely happy. Each had brought up the other from her earliest infancy, and although each was exquisitely modest in all that pertained to herself, in regard to the fruit of her handiwork each had formed an exaggerated estimate. Goose was inordinately proud of Muffin, and Muffin was inordinately proud of Goose.

Tobias was borne in a bag. Although he was strictly forbidden to catch rabbits, he was never denied an airing.

"There goes a squirrel," said Muffin. "Look, in that tree. Up he goes; but it is not very high. I wonder if we could catch him for Aunt Caroline. Hold my bread and butter, and don't eat it."

Muffin had already established herself upon the first branch, when a voice, great alike in authority and scornfulness, was heard through the early morning stillness.

"Come out of that tree, you Ragamuffin," it said. "Leave that squirrel alone, and kindly take the trouble to read the notice underneath you. 'The public is allowed in these woods on sufferance only by permission of the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne. Any person guilty of disorderly conduct, or who does willful damage to the trees, shrubs, and flowers, or who attempts to take fish from the lake, or who wanders in search of game, will be prosecuted

with the utmost rigor of the law.' Come down at once, you Ragamuffin."

The voice belonged to Jim Lascelles, of course. Jim was looking rather haggard, weary, and disheveled. The truth is he had had no sleep during the night. In the acute phase of his fortunes he could not rest. A sensitive conscience assured him that he was on forbidden ground, seeking fruit to which he had no lawful claim. He would have been far better in Normandy.

This morning he was in a really desperate humor. Work had never been farther from his thoughts, and the fact that two persons had been reputed recently to have lost their lives in an attempted ascent of the Devil's Footstool, seemed to invest that precipitous chasm with a certain attraction.

"Look here, you law-breakers," said he, "let us go and have a look at the Devil's Footstool."

The Misses Perry needed no second invitation. The dark and baleful ascent looming up from the lower end of the lake had fascinated them already, and they had even made one or two tentative attempts upon it. A walk of twenty minutes brought them to the foot thereof; and Tobias being left in his bag at the bottom, the three of them began to conduct some highly interesting and extremely thrilling investigations.

From ledge to ledge they went, rising rapidly to a dizzy and precarious height. On one side of them was a torrent, on the other a chasm. But they went up resolutely, without a pause, although the foot-

hold was very uncertain, and it meant death and destruction to look down. And when, in the course of three hours, they returned breathless and disheveled to whence they started, having made a complete circuit of the Devil's Footstool, and the three of them sat down exulting in their weariness by the side of Tobias, they really felt that they had achieved something. All the most signal performances of Widdiford and Slocum Magna had been effaced.

According to Borrow, Wales is not only a picturesque, but also a romantic country. Therefore, it must not surprise the judicious reader that by half-past nine on this memorable August morning Jim Lascelles had become a hero. The breakfast table at Pen-y-Gros Castle was regaled by an extremely thrilling narrative of adventures by gorge and chasm.

It was not quite clear—and even to this day the mystery has not been elucidated—whether Jim Lascelles had saved the life of Muffin, or whether Muffin had saved the life of Jim Lascelles. But one fact emerged clear, distinct, and radiant. Jim Lascelles was a hero of the first class. His conduct within the precincts of the Devil's Footstool merited a diploma.

Cheriton seconded the praises of his *protégé.*

"It is bred in the fellow," said he. "His father, you know, was Lascelles, V.C."

"He looks that kind of young man," assented Miss Burden. "His eyes are so open and fearless."

As soon as Aunt Caroline was visible, which was not until noon, she was put in possession of the facts.

"Who, pray, is Jim Lascelles?" was her first inquiry; and the tone of it was not wholly sympathetic.

"He used to live at the Red House at Widdiford," chimed both her nieces as one.

In spite of his heroism, which no amount of cross-examination could mitigate, a few leading questions which Elizabeth was called upon to answer had the effect of rendering Aunt Caroline decidedly hostile to Jim Lascelles. For the identity of the presumptuous young man was only too soon established. He was the person who had had the impertinence to fling himself out of the house in Hill Street when he had been rebuked in a becoming manner for conduct which was really unpardonable. As for the "Jim," it literally stuck in Aunt Caroline's throat.

It was almost the only reminder that their august relation had had, beyond the scanty character of their wardrobes and their plebeian devotion to bread and jam, that their upbringing had been that of Tom, Dick, and Harry.

"Elizabeth," said Aunt Caroline, "it would be more seemly to my mind if you have occasion to mention Mr. Lascelles to speak of him as such."

Muffin opened solemn and round eyes of wonder upon Aunt Caroline.

"Oh, but," said she, "if I called Jim Mr. Lascelles he would pull my hair."

"In that case," said Aunt Caroline, "you would do well to terminate the acquaintance."

"But he saved me from falling down the preci-

pice," said Muffin, "and I am going to write to dearest papa about it."

"Caroline," said Cheriton, "a truce to Whig exclusiveness. Behave like a human being, and ask the young fellow to dinner. Ask his mother also. I am told she is a singularly agreeable woman."

Aunt Caroline sat the image of blue-blooded defiance. George Betterton, however, who had listened torpidly to the account of the episode, was prevailed upon by the general enthusiasm for Jim Lascelles, and the favorable impression he had already formed of that hero's mother, to throw the weight of his own influence into the scale.

"Right thing, Caroline," said George, "to ask the young fellow to dinner in the circumstances. Behaved very well, they tell me."

"He shall not cross my threshold," said Caroline, "until he apologizes for his behavior to me in Hill Street."

"Of course he will apologize," said Cheriton, "if you hold out the olive branch. He can't apologize unless you do."

"I am sure, dear Lady Crewkerne," ventured Miss Burden, "Mr. Lascelles is a gentleman and his mother is a——"

Miss Burden was unable to complete her remark. She was annihilated by a terrific glance. The elder Miss Perry also, as was to be expected, behaved very tactlessly.

"Jim is just a sweet," she drawled ridiculously, "and dear Mrs. Lascelles is just a sweet too."

The glance which had slain Miss Burden was extended to the elder Miss Perry. Its effect in that quarter was by no means so terrible. That Featherbrain sustained it with the most admirable composure.

" Jim is just a sweet," said she, " and Muffin saved him from falling over the precipice."

" I was given to understand," said Aunt Caroline, " that it was the man Lascelles who saved Elizabeth."

" Yes, it was, Aunt Caroline," said Muffin; " but Goose is rather a silly."

Of course there could only be one conclusion to the whole matter. The massed force of public opinion was too much for the Whig remnant, even in its own stronghold. Ungraciously, it must be confessed, Miss Burden was commanded to write as follows: " The Countess of Crewkerne requests the pleasure of the company of Mrs. Lascelles and Mr. James Lascelles at dinner this evening at 8:30."

" This is one of your white days, Caroline," said her oldest friend, with approbation. " A singularly gracious act in a life which, if I may say so, has not been too full of them. We must mark it with a little white stone."

" Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said the old lady. " Who has dared to remove the ribbon from Ponto's neck?"

" He lost it in the water, Aunt Caroline," said Muffin, with all the assurance of one in favor at Court, " when he fell in."

" When he fell in!" said Aunt Caroline.

"He went to sleep on the edge of the punt," Muffin explained, "and he toppled over."

"I trust," said the least of Ponto's admirers, "that the obese beast will not gain length of days from his immersion."

John, wearing his second-best livery, which he always affected in Wales, delivered the mandate at Jim Lascelles' lodgings in Pen-y-Gros hamlet, but that hero and his mother had gone down to the lake. They were joined there presently by a cheerful party of four persons. Jim Lascelles was very heartily congratulated upon the heroism he had displayed.

"It has given great pleasure at the Castle," said Cheriton, "where heroism is always, and I think justly, admired. My friend Brancaster will exert himself to get you a medal. Doubtless your Sovereign will present it to you."

George Betterton, in the manner of a true-blue Englishman, went the length of shaking the hero very heartily by the hand.

"Great pleasure to me, Mr. Lascelles," said that worthy, "to hear of your gallant action. Congratulate you heartily. Would have given great pleasure to your gallant father."

Jim Lascelles laid down his palette with an air of tremendous truculence.

"To whom am I indebted for this?" said he. "Which of them is it? I suspect that Goose."

"They are both of them Geese," said Jim's mother.

"Aunt Caroline thinks it is so splendid of you," said Muffin, who was seated on the pebbles for the purpose of removing her shoes and stockings. "She has invited you and dear Mrs. Lascelles to dinner."

"You incomparably foolish person," said Jim. "I've a great mind now not to paint your picture."

"A pair of irresponsible babblers," said Jim's mother, whose eyes were really very much brighter than they had any need to be. "One is as bad as the other. But an old woman feels very proud of her son all the same."

Jim Lascelles stuck his hands in his pockets ruefully.

"This is the deuce," said he. "Upon my word, I deny the whole thing in the most absolute and unconditional manner."

"I have heard you deny your genius before now," said Mrs. Lascelles; "but, my dear boy, you have never been able to convince Lord Cheriton that you are not a genius. And I feel sure that all you say to the contrary will fail to convince him that you are not a hero."

"Absurd!" said Jim, hotly. "I am as much of one as I am of the other."

"A dooced awkward place you are in, my dear fellow," said Cheriton. "Everybody who has heard Miss Muffin's thrilling account of her deliverance from an imminent and deadly peril within the precincts of the Devil's Coal Box——"

"Footstool," said the elder Miss Perry.

"Footstool, I stand corrected," said Cheriton, add-

ing new embellishments to his oratory. "Everybody who has heard Miss Muffin's hair-raising narrative of her deliverance from an imminent and deadly peril within the precincts of the Devil's Footstool has conceived a deep admiration for its author. From my old and misguided friend Lady Crewkerne to Ponto himself, all at the Castle are of one mind. I may say the admiration of our friend Miss Burden is already tinged with passion."

"Put on those shoes and stockings, you Ragamuffin," said Jim. "I shall not paint you."

"But, Jim," said that artless person, with eyes of extraordinary roundness and candor, "you promised to."

"Lascelles," said Cheriton, "I am afraid, my dear fellow, you must accept the inevitable with all the grace at your command. No reasonable person can possibly doubt your heroism, and I fear it is only critics of the older school who can doubt your genius. It is hard to conceive a situation more trying to a modest young Englishman, educated at Harrow. My dear Mrs. Lascelles, I feel constrained to compliment you publicly upon having a son who is the dooce of a fine fellow."

"I am glad you think so, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother. "I think so myself."

Thereupon the green linen frock and the red umbrella and the French novel, together with an extremely choice suit of tweeds and a superb Panama hat, went along by the lake to take a closer view of that formidable chasm, the Devil's Footstool. At the

same time George Betterton handed Miss Goose aboard the punt.

Jim Lascelles took up the tools of his trade.

"Get into the water, you Ragamuffin," said he. "I'll paint you with pink eyes and green hair. And your frock shall not have a single rent in it. It shall be the last cry of the fashion."

Things went excellently well for a time. It was a glorious August day. There was hardly a cloud about Gwydr; the sky was of a pure Italian hue; there was scarcely a puff of wind to ruffle Lake Dwygy. For a bright and diligent hour Jim Lascelles was on the best of terms with his canvas.

"Keep that side, you Ragamuffin," said he, "and give the light of the morning a chance. Keep that cucumber basket out of the eye of the sun. And don't leave the water on any pretext whatever. I am not in the least interested in toads, newts, lizards, speckled trout, ferns, grass, or in your general conversation. Soak and tear and soil your garments to your heart's content, but you take those Foot Pieces out of the water on pain of appearing at Burlington House as an American heiress."

"But, Jim——"

"Silence, you Ragamuffin."

"But, Jim, there is dearest Aunt Caroline."

It was perfectly true. The mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle was standing five yards from the canvas. She was in the full panoply of war. Ponto, her aide-de-camp, and Miss Burden, her gentlewoman, were by

her side. Her ebony stick supported her venerable frame; her headdress was surmounted by a hat that had been fashionable in 1880. An eyeglass was in her grim old eye; and her gentlewoman held an umbrella over her to protect her aged form from the fierce rays which, according to Borrow, are sometimes reflected from the slopes of the Welsh mountains.

" I am sorry to curtail a discourse on art," said the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle, speaking in a tone that was beautifully distinct, " but you do not seem to be aware that the public is allowed in these grounds on sufferance only."

Jim took off his hat and bowed in a very becoming if slightly ironical manner.

" I beg your pardon, Lady Crewkerne," said he, " but I am aware of that perfectly. I have seen the notice which warns the public at least six times this morning."

" I hope you will heed it," said Lady Crewkerne.

" It does not forbid the public to paint the scenery, I believe," said Jim coolly.

Jim had really no right to be so cool in the presence of the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle. All the same, it is by no means certain that she did not respect him for it.

" It depends," said she, " upon what portion of the scenery the public wishes to paint. For instance, you appear to be painting some person who stands in the water. And the public is expressly forbidden to enter the water."

"I am sorry," said Jim Lascelles. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure."

Jim Lascelles, for all his coolness, did not quite know what to say next to keep within the rules of the game. However, that section of the public that was standing in the water saw fit rather providentially to disobey the instructions of the artist. She left the water and came resolutely to the aid of Jim Lascelles. Barefooted and with her skirt kilted in the true Slocum Magna and Widdiford manner, she accosted the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle.

"Dearest Aunt Caroline," said she, "this is Mr. Jim Lascelles, who saved me from falling over the precipice this morning."

"We have met before, I think," said Aunt Caroline, grimly.

"Wasn't it brave of him?" said Muffin.

"Mr. Lascelles," said Aunt Caroline, "you appear to have acted in a prompt and courageous manner, and I congratulate you upon your manly conduct."

"Thank you, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim, with excellent gravity, "but I am happy to say Miss Perry has greatly exaggerated the occurrence."

"Oh, no, Jim," said Miss Perry. "Ask Goose."

"There is one thing, Mr. Lascelles," said the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle, "that I hope you will take to heart. In future the public will be strictly forbidden to climb the Devil's Footstool."

"I think that precaution will be in its interests," said Jim. "It is all right going up, but it is a wicked place coming down."

"Well, Mr. Lascelles," said Lady Crewkerne, "it is satisfactory to learn that this injudicious adventure has terminated without loss of life. I shall be glad if you will dine at the Castle this evening."

Jim Lascelles was sufficiently mollified by the tone to accept the invitation.

"And for my part," said Jim, after he had done so, "I shall be glad, Lady Crewkerne, if you will accept an apology for my behavior the last time we met. I am afraid I was very much in the wrong."

"Mr. Lascelles," said Lady Crewkerne, speaking very distinctly, "I have since thought that matter over carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that there is no need for me to revise the judgment I formed at the time. You were very much in the wrong. All the same, I have pleasure in accepting your apology. Burden, we will return. I feel the heat."

Things having been placed on this amicable basis, the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle withdrew with her retinue, and Muffin returned to the water.

CHAPTER XXVII

REVEL IS HELD AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE

MODEST revel was held that evening at the Castle. Jim's mother erred so much on the side of youth that Jim was disposed to blame her for wearing her best gown. She knew as well as anybody that she always did look young in her best gown, almost to the point of impropriety. It had been obtained in Paris for one thing, not very recently, it is true, for Jim was then a gay and careless student at L'École des Beaux Arts; but, even at that time of day, the dressmakers of Paris were said to possess a lightness of touch, a grace, and a felicity which made for youth. In her heart, there is reason to believe, Jim's mother considered her son to be unduly sensitive upon the score of her appearance.

Caroline Crewkerne was moderately civil to Jim's mother. But of course she wore a certain number of airs, as she did invariably when she had to do with persons of her own sex whom she did not consider to be her equals socially. But perhaps there is no need to blame her. The chameleon can change its spots, but it is not really more respected than the leopard. Caroline Crewkerne was three and seventy, and habit was strong in her. She belonged to a period when airs were more in vogue, when the world was not so

democratic as it is in these days, when human destinies were more unequal.

If Jim's mother was a little amused by the "grand manner"—and doubtless she was, because she had seen something of Cosmopolis, and was therefore not exactly a provincial—she was too good-natured and too well bred to show it. But it is to be feared that Jim resented it. He blamed himself for being fool enough to come. Jim had at least one of the essentials necessary to success in life. He was an excellent hater. He hated well, and he hated heartily, and he forgave with difficulty. And certainly he hated this old woman and all her works.

A common and watchful friend in fine lawn and pomatum stood a little apart to witness Caroline Crewkerne offer two fingers and to witness Jim Lascelles accept them. Jim got through the ordeal without any real loss of credit, although his mother knew that he was angry. However, there were compensations. George Betterton greeted the young fellow in quite a hearty manner; Miss Burden beamed upon him, and her appearance was singularly agreeable with "a romantic tale on her eyelashes"; while the Miss Perrys, of course, were triumphs of female loveliness. The elder of the twain, in her "play-acting frock," as Aunt Caroline called it, and with her daffodil-colored mane done low down in her neck in a most remarkable simulation of the eighteenth century, by the hand of the incomparable but exacting Fanchette, was enough to haunt any young painter for many days to come. Muffin, too, with her bril-

liant health and her open manners, with a coloring only less wonderful than that of her sister, and with a physique pure of line and of a spreading stalwart symmetry, looked every inch of her a veritable younger sister of the goddess. Fanchette had been coaxed, perhaps by an inborn love of her art, to embellish Muffin's yellow mane also with the hand of her great talent, so that it also sat low down in her neck in a fashion fit to inspire a sonnet. Muffin's frock was of pure white—at least, it was of that hue when it was first purchased. And although it was cheap and countrified and by no means new, and it was rent in three places, and was very short in the sleeves and very tight all over, it really suited her to perfection, as somehow everything did that she wore.

Lord Cheriton was delighted.

"Mrs. Lascelles," said he, at the first opportunity, "what do you think of our Miss Gunnings?"

Jim's mother sighed a little.

"Perfectly distracting," said she. "And yet it only seems yesterday that they were long-legged creatures in short white socks."

By the dispensation of the powers George Betterton took in his hostess, Cheriton took in the wife of the Vicar, the Vicar took in Mrs. Lascelles, Jim took in Miss Burden, and the Miss Perrys took in one another.

Jim Lascelles never remembered a meal that he enjoyed less, except in after-years when—but we must not overrun our story. For the greater part of the conversation was confined to one theme, and the

theme was heroism. Cheriton claimed the respectful indulgence of the table while Muffin furnished her thrilling narrative with all the latest embellishments. It is true that she suffered occasional contradiction in the course of it from her muddle-headed but tenacious sister Goose, but her testimony remained substantially unshaken. Mr. James Lascelles was a hero, no doubt about that.

When the dessert stage was reached, Cheriton pledged Jim's health in felicitous terms and in some excellent madeira. Jim responded with a vehement denial of the charges brought against him.

"Why," said Cheriton, "the young fellow will deny his genius next."

"Yes," said Jim's mother, "he would, only he knows it is no use."

After dinner there was music. Caroline Crewkerne had an ingrained dislike of music which amounted to destestation, but on this occasion it was permitted as a concession to the Church. The Vicar's wife had a light soprano voice, and sang very pleasantly, although rather nervous at first. The Vicar's rendering of the "Bay of Biscay" was justly admired. Jim's mother interpreted Chopin with such refinement and delicacy that Caroline Crewkerne was able to get a short nap. But quite one of the most admired achievements of the evening was George Betterton's rendering of what he called his "one horse," a technical term which baffled everybody as to its meaning, including Cheriton himself, that veritable encyclopedia of human information.

George Betterton's "one horse" was "We'll all go a-hunting to-day," with chorus. This he rendered with the most resolute disregard of time and tune, and in the most dogged and sonorous manner. The Vicar's wife accompanied him and finished three bars in front of George, and so "won as she pleased," in the judgment of Cheriton, who, in addition to his other accomplishments, was a critic of the art of music. However, Muffin and Jim Lascelles were heard to such advantage in the chorus that there was no doubt about its success. They were importuned upon this revelation of their talent to sing a solo apiece. They contrived to evade this penalty on the plea that they had never sung in public before, although Goose declared that Muffin had sung by herself twice in Slocum Magna parish church with great distinction.

"But that wasn't in public," said Muffin, staunchly. "Besides, it was after dearest papa had preached his sermon."

"I am afraid, my dear Miss Muffin," said Cheriton, "that the point is too subtle for the lay intelligence."

Although Muffin and Jim Lascelles were absolved from singing solos, they were unable wholly to evade the penalty incurred by the revelation of their gifts. They were haled to the piano to sing a duet from *H.M.S. Pinafore;* and made such a hopeless mess of the performance that Jim's mother, to whom the accompaniment was intrusted, took the extreme course of closing the piano in the middle of it and retiring in dudgeon.

A display of thought-reading concluded the proceedings. The Vicar's wife was a clairvoyante, noted for miles around. Cheriton also confessed to powers in this occult science. The Vicar's wife was only permitted to perform one feat, because the Vicar declared that if she attempted more than one in an evening it excited her so much that she never slept all night. The task allotted to her was that she should take the ribbon from Ponto's neck and tie it around Goose's finger. The feat was performed with such exemplary ease that Muffin felt sure that she could do something. Her task was the elementary one of giving Miss Burden a kiss. Instead of doing this, however, she hugged Aunt Caroline. In the opinion, however, of those best acquainted with these mysteries, she was held to be so nearly right that her reputation was established forthwith.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Goose, with dilated eyes. "I shall write to dearest papa about it. At the next entertainment in Slocum Magna parish-room Muffin will have to do something."

"I think," said Jim's mother, "her powers as a clairvoyante are superior to her powers as a cantatrice."

Muffin was showing a desire to give a further display of her newly discovered talent, when Aunt Caroline said it was half-past ten, and that Araminta and Elizabeth must retire.

After saluting Aunt Caroline in a very dutiful manner they obeyed this edict with most admirable docility. It proved a signal for the general dispersal

of the company. There is reason to believe that Aunt Caroline intended that it should.

No sooner were the Vicar and his wife and Jim Lascelles and his mother abroad in the rapt summer stillness, and they were picking their way through the tomblike darkness of the wood towards Pen-y-Gros hamlet, than the inmates of the castle sat down to the green table. Caroline Crewkerne yawned vigorously. But her opponents did well not to misinterpret that action, because this old woman was never known to sit down to cards without proving herself to be more than usually wide awake.

"Caroline," said her oldest friend, "this is certainly one of the whitest days in all my recollection of you. I can't say positively that you were genial, but I feel that I am entitled to affirm that you got through the evening without insulting anybody."

"The middle classes are so tiresome," said Caroline, cutting for the deal and winning it easily.

"The middle classes are almost extinct as a genus," said Cheriton. "They have assimilated culture so rapidly since that fellow Arnold wrote to them upon the subject that nowadays they are almost as extinct as the dodo."

"Pshaw!" said Caroline, carefully sorting a hand that contained four aces and three kings. "It is only skin deep. Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton. I declare no trumps."

"I shall not double," said Cheriton, who found himself in possession of a "Yarborough."

In a very short space of time, Cheriton and Miss

Burden had suffered the indignity of the "grand slam."

"Well played, partner," said George, as soon as he woke up.

There can be really no question at all that few persons could have played their cards better than Caroline Crewkerne, when that old woman found herself with a good hand. And few persons found themselves oftener in that enviable position than did she. Certainly this evening she surpassed herself. It is true that the cards came her way in the most surprising fashion. But she utilized them to the full; and further, she took advantage of the mistakes of her principal adversary.

It was not often that Cheriton was guilty of flagrant errors, but on this occasion he certainly held bad cards, and to these he added unmistakably inferior play. He forgot important cards constantly; and twice at a critical moment he revoked. Caroline was in the highest glee. Everything went right for her; and the sum she won from Cheriton it would not be wise or right to divulge, lest it shock the less affluent among our readers. It was not really enough "to endow a hospital for the incurably insane," as Cheriton declared it was, but it certainly enabled the lucky Caroline to contemplate the purchase of a few of those Westralians which she had coveted for some time past.

Happily neither Miss Burden nor George Betterton could afford to play for money; the former because her salary of forty pounds per annum was her only

means of subsistence; the latter because his high rank rendered it necessary that in all respects his life should be a pattern to his admiring countrymen. We have no desire to lower a very worthy man in the public estimation, but this desire for respectability did not prevent his losing continually at piquet to Caroline Crewkerne. But then piquet is not like bridge. The one is old and of good report; the other is new and plutocratic.

A little after midnight George Betterton retired in earnest to his virtuous repose, while Miss Burden followed his example. And no sooner had the hostess and her old friend the field to themselves than they reverted to the topic of the previous night. The matter had been left in an interesting stage. Cheriton felt it to be a hopeful one. He was sure that he had no serious rival to contend against, for George with all his flourishes was sure to end by marrying Priscilla. The Georges of this world invariably marry the Priscillas.

"I am willing to tie three thousand a year upon the creature," said Cheriton. His tone was not exactly that of an auctioneer, although his standard of wisdom rendered it necessary that he should always suit his discourse to his company. "Upon the condition, my dear Caroline, that you tie an equal sum upon her. And there is also a living in my gift worth eleven hundred a year which is likely to be vacant."

So much for the terms. Caroline Crewkerne pondered them well. She was a shrewd, covetous, hard-headed, hard-hearted old woman. But if she

took a thing in hand she carried it through. And she had determined to do something for her dead and disgraced sister's portionless daughter. Up to a point she was able to plume herself upon the success of the negotiations. What she did not like was the sacrifice of some of her own money. It would not make the least difference to her. She had more already than she knew what to do with, but to part with her substance always hurt her.

"We will say fifteen hundred, Cheriton, and call it settled," said Caroline with the air of a money-lender.

Her old friend frankly enjoyed the situation. He knew where the shoe pinched as well as she did. Her craft and her avarice reminded him of Balzac's novels.

"If you say fifteen hundred, my dear Caroline," said her old friend, "I must say fifteen hundred too."

Caroline pondered again. Cheriton was not a good life, and nearly everything was entailed.

"Three thousand a year in perpetuity?" said Caroline, harshly.

"Ye-es," said Cheriton. "Dooced liberal, I think, for a poor parson's daughter."

Caroline bristled. She looked not only prickly but venomous.

"Don't forget, Cheriton," she said truculently, "that the creature is a Wargrave."

"An effete strain, there is reason to fear," said Cheriton with perfect composure.

The head-dress performed surprising feats. Cher-

iton fell to considerations of how far it might be safe to bait the old lioness. No sport is worth much without there is a spice of danger in it. He enjoyed the play none the less because he was so sensible of its peril. Caroline Crewkerne was not a person to be baited with impunity.

However, in spite of the head-dress and the gleams of red that flashed from the ruthless orbs beneath it, he was able to assume an aspect of excellent indifference. The finished duplicity may not have deceived his old friend or it may have done so. At least the old lioness grew more couchant in her aspect. But the mouth was as resolute in its sarcasm as ever.

" Well, Caroline," said Cheriton, amiably, " let us settle the thing one way or the other. It is becoming tedious."

Perhaps Caroline thought so too. Or perhaps she thought she had made a reasonably good bargain, all things considered, and that she was not likely to do better. For there came a further accession of scorn to the grim old countenance, and for a moment the head-dress ceased its immodest gyrations.

" Take the girl and be damned," said Caroline Crewkerne.

Cheriton bowed with ironical politeness. He had got his way, not of course that there was anything surprising in that. He had had it so often. Still there was a certain satisfaction in it, for it always seems a part of the essential fitness of things that one should get one's way, no matter how much one is accustomed to getting it. He was also a little inclined

to plume himself, as was too often the case with him, on his diplomacy. It was really an achievement to screw a cool three thousand a year out of the most avaricious old woman in England. Yet it may have been that he had only inserted that clause into the negotiations to give them a further spice. It had enabled him to pose as the prophet of justice, liberality, and other delectable things. He had never cared greatly about money, but that was no reason why he should not bait those who did care greatly about it when he was in need of a little private relaxation.

Cheriton went to bed and slept the sleep of the just. By the exercise of his talents he had got a charming countess on liberal terms. How the young fellows would envy him! His affectation of youth would now lose its point. Upon the day he married his young goddess he would resume his natural age, which was sixty-five. In his mind's eye he could see himself walking down the aisle on the happy occasion with all the gravity of a pillar of the Government, of one eminent in council, looking if anything rather more than his years in order to score off the rising generation.

"He is so old, my dear!" he could hear the buzz of tongues. Yes, so old; what had happened to Youth and its vaunted pretensions?

Caroline Crewkerne went to bed, and she slept the sleep of the just also. All the same there is really no reason why she should have done so. For there was precious little justice in that old woman. She was well satisfied that she had won at cards, but in

the matter of her niece she had a very decided feeling that that man Cheriton had overreached her. The clause of the three thousand pounds per annum took a good deal of the gilt off the gingerbread. Without that clause there would have been a certain amount of gilt upon it.

Cheriton, for all his coxcombry, was a pretty considerable *parti*, at whom the arrows of the worldly had been aimed for two generations. But in Caroline's own phrase, "Cheriton was no fool." In spite of his vanity and his fribbling he knew his way about the world. He was a cool hand. He marked his quarry and pursued it at his leisure, in his own impersonal and peculiar way, and never once had he been caught napping. Great would be the applause and the merriment when it became bruited about that this astute bird had actually been limed by the old fowler of Hill Street. And after all nobody need know about that three thousand pounds per annum.

Therefore both parties to this transaction slept the sleep of the just, and next morning had breakfast in their rooms. At half-past five a.m. the unconscious object of their negotiations was haled out of bed by her sister Muffin. And as the descent to the floor did not arouse her, she was beaten about the head with a pillow until that object had been attained. They spent incomparable hours among the dew on the slopes of Gwydr and his brethren. Jim Lascelles was with them. He piloted them among the rocks, and was of course prepared to save their lives if necessary.

These were indeed golden and enchanted hours. For all her slowness of speech and action the Goose Girl had a certain animation and inward fire when in her true Slocum Magna form. Little of it had been seen in Hill Street, for amid that rather dismal splendor she was a bird in a cage. But now with the freedom of the mountains conferred upon her, with Jim upon one hand and Muffin upon the other, existence was a carol. The old glories of the Red House at Widdiford were revived.

These joys continued during a number of glorious and golden days. Cheriton, secure in his prize, was in no hurry to impale his butterfly. She was a charming picture, and he would claim her at his leisure. In the meantime let her garner up a store of health and vigor upon the mountains in the society of her peers. For, truth to tell, the bridegroom-elect was apt to get fatigued rather easily, and it was really more satisfying to share a red umbrella with an intellectual equal and to discuss the French writers beside the lake.

Therefore, with that humane wisdom which distinguished him above other men, Cheriton was content that each of them should continue in their paradise as long as it could possibly endure. Things were going very well as they were. Why disturb them? The prize was secure. Caroline Crewkerne had given her sanction and had written to her lawyer upon the subject. There was really no more to be said. Why imperil the perfect harmony of the passing hour? All in good season; when there were no mountains,

no lakes, no cloudless August skies, no red umbrellas, no green frocks, no singularly companionable, cultivated, and agreeable students of the best French literature, would be the time to speak of love.

Yes, Cheriton was a cool hand. Indeed, so much so that Caroline Crewkerne was a little inclined to doubt his *bona fides*.

"I have not seen the creature in tears yet," said she three days after that memorable night in which the compact was made.

"Do not let us commit the indiscretion, my dear Caroline," said the happy wooer, in his most musical manner, "of acting prematurely. I have always been a believer in *laissez faire*. If things are going obviously right, why disturb them? The creature rejoices like a lark in her youth, her companions, and her mountains. I am too old for mountains myself. But do not let us curtail her happiness by a single hour. And, upon my word, she seems to grow more glorious every time I look at her."

"Humph!" said Caroline Crewkerne.

She was too wise to say anything else.

"Let us do nothing, my dear Caroline," said the happy wooer, "to impede the spontaneous acquisition of health, vigor, gayety, and flowerlike simplicity. Upon my word, the bracing climate of the Welsh mountains has given her a fire and a gladness and natural spontaneity which I do not think even Borrow himself could wholly account for. It does one good to sit apart and see it grow."

"Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, "if I had

not the best of reasons to know the contrary I should think you were a fool."

"I am very happy to be one just now," said he, "in the cause of youth."

"You were always a coxcomb," said his unsparing critic, "and I quite expect that one of these days you will have to pay a price for it. In my opinion it is quite time the creature began to shed a few tears."

"No, no, Caroline. Let us have the common humanity to give her the undiluted joy of her mountains as long as we can."

Caroline shook her worldly wise old head. She grew very thoughtful indeed. There was the question of the red umbrella. But she did not alarm herself. Cheriton had played that game so often.

The days passed merrily. It was a perfect time, with hardly more than the suspicion of a cloud about the noble head of Gwydr. And as the waters of Lake Dwygy preserved their seductive and delicious coolness it is not to be wondered at that the picture of the naiad made great progress.

There was no doubt about the wonderful increase of power that had come to Jim Lascelles. Having given his days to the painting of the Goose Girl and his nights to thoughts of her, this expenditure of spirit was now manifesting itself in his brush. The naiad bade fair to be a brilliantly poetic composition, whose color had that harmonious daring that had given Monsieur Gillet an European fame. The frank treatment of the naiad's blue eyes and yellow hair, which had made the portrait of her sister so won-

derful, were here adjusted to the majestic scheme of Dwygy's blue waters, and Gwydr's brown slopes crowned with a golden haze, with here and there a black patch of the woods about Pen-y-Gros. Cheriton, who among his other recommendations was a trustee of the National Gallery, ministered to the pride of the painter's mother by his outspoken praise of what he considered to be a signal work of art.

The August sunshine, however, cannot last for ever. And at last, as Muffin's second triumphant fortnight was nearing its close, the clouds gathered about Gwydr and his brethren, and the woods of Pen-y-Gros were drenched with a sopping mist. This presently turned to a downpour of rain which lasted a day and a night, and in that period something happened.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A THUNDERBOLT

WHILE the rain was beating with monotonous persistence upon the oriel windows of Pen-y-Gros Castle, Araminta was summoned to Aunt Caroline's boudoir. So little did that artless being suspect calamity that she obeyed the summons joyfully, because she felt convinced that Aunt Caroline was to confer with her as to whether Muffin would like to stay still longer. But it proved to be something else.

Aunt Caroline was looking very bleak and formidable, and Lord Cheriton, who was present also, had never seemed so much like a parent, so benevolently unbending was his manner.

"Girl," said Aunt Caroline—she very seldom addressed Araminta in any other style than "Girl"—"sit there and try not to behave foolishly. I am going to speak about your future."

So little was Araminta preoccupied with things in general that she hardly knew that she had such a thing as a future. However, with her usual docility, she sat upon the chair that Aunt Caroline had indicated, and proceeded to give her best attention to her august relation.

"I will be brief," said Aunt Caroline, with an extremely businesslike air. "My old friend Lord Cheriton has been good enough to take an interest in you, and if you are a good girl he will marry you. You have no objection, I presume?"

It was clear by Aunt Caroline's tone that she merely asked the last question as a matter of form. But that brisk old worldling went a little too quickly for her niece Araminta, who was really a very slow-witted creature. Some little time had to pass before she could accept the purport of Aunt Caroline's announcement. And when at last she was able to do so it literally took away her breath.

Aunt Caroline allowed the creature quite thirty seconds in which to reply. No reply being forthcoming in that space of time, she proceeded to address her as though she were a prisoner at the bar.

"Well, girl," said Aunt Caroline, "what have you to say?"

Araminta had nothing to say apparently. But from the uppermost forehead to the depths of the neck, a slowly deepening wave of scarlet was spreading over the whole surface of her frank and vividly colored countenance.

"Humph!" said Aunt Caroline; "no objection apparently." She then addressed a third person very succinctly. "Cheriton," said she, "I congratulate you. You are not everybody's choice, and I must confess to some surprise that no objection has been urged. That is the Wargrave in her, I dare say. The Wargraves have always known how to accept

the inevitable. They have often gone to the scaffold rather than make a pother."

"Family pride again, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, in a voice of honey. "Still, in the circumstances, perhaps a slight display of it is pardonable. History is not my strong point, but I seem to remember that between the age of Edward VI. and the age of Victoria the Wargraves went oftener to the scaffold than anywhere else. To a layman that always appears to be one of the baffling points about the pride of old families. If we go back far enough we generally find that a lawyer who was too astute to be honest established their fortunes; or a fellow who managed to cheat the troops in Flanders of their food and clothing."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said Caroline, sharply. "Remember my niece. I shall expect you to be good to her. Fortunately for herself she has no brains, but she eats well and sleeps well, she is quite healthy in every respect, and her disposition is affectionate."

"Our dear Miss Goose is perfectly charming," said Cheriton, ogling Miss Perry, who by this time was trembling violently, and who sat in solemn scarlet consternation. "I am the proudest man in England."

Caroline Crewkerne raised a finger.

"You have said enough, Cheriton," said she. "I have my own opinion about the transaction, but I am inclined to think the creature might have done worse. You can go now, girl. Don't mention this matter

to your sister until you have my permission to do so."

Miss Perry rose with her usual docility, but in her countenance was an ever-deepening scarlet. She moved slowly and heavily to the door of the boudoir without speaking a word, either to her aunt or to Lord Cheriton. Her hand was already upon the door when she turned round and faced the former. The blue eyes were full of dismay.

"If you please, Aunt Caroline," she drawled in her ridiculous manner, "I don't *quite* think I can marry Lord Cheriton."

The old woman sat up in her chair in the manner of a Lord Chief Justice who has been confronted with a flagrant contempt of court.

"What do you mean, girl?" said she. "You don't *quite* think you can marry Lord Cheriton. Explain your meaning."

In the most favorable circumstances it was never very easy for Miss Perry to explain her meaning. In these she seemed to find considerable difficulty in doing so. Aunt Caroline gave her exactly thirty seconds, but Miss Perry required longer than that.

"Speak, girl," said Aunt Caroline. "Are you dumb?"

Miss Perry was not dumb, but speech had never been so tardy.

"Girl, will you have the goodness to explain," said the old lady, "why you are not *quite* able to marry Lord Cheriton?"

At last Miss Perry was able to furnish the required explanation.

"If you please, Aunt Caroline," she drawled ridiculously, "I have p-r-r-romised to marry Jim."

The old lady's ebony walking-stick fell to the ground so peremptorily that Ponto was disturbed in his slumbers.

"Jim!" said Aunt Caroline. "Who, pray, is Jim?"

"Jim Lascelles," said Miss Perry.

"I presume you mean the painting man," said Aunt Caroline.

"Yes," said Miss Perry.

There was a pause in which Cheriton and his old friend looked at one another long and particularly.

"Hand me my stick, girl," said Aunt Caroline.

Miss Perry did as she was desired. Her manner of doing it seemed to imply that she expected to receive physical correction.

"Sit down, girl," said Aunt Caroline.

Miss Perry resumed her chair, doubtless with an emotion of thankfulness upon her narrow escape.

"I could not have believed it to be possible," said Aunt Caroline, speaking very slowly, "that a Wargrave could have been so imprudent, so ungrateful, so entirely lacking in self-respect."

This indictment was delivered in the most deliberate and crushing manner; but a good deal of the effect was marred because Cheriton laughed outright in the middle of it. Aunt Caroline, however, presented a haughty indifference to the behavior of the

husband-elect, who, of course, was not himself a Wargrave, and whose behavior in this crisis showed that fact clearly.

" Are you mad, girl? " said the old lady. " Answer me."

" Jim is awfully nice," drawled Miss Perry.

The ebony walking-stick and the head-dress performed a concerted piece together which filled Ponto with consternation.

" The creature must be a natural."

Miss Perry grew bolder, however, as the clear conviction that she was pledged to Jim Lascelles took a firmer hold upon her.

" We shall not marry just yet, don't you know," said Miss Perry, with the air of one who imparts valuable information. " But Jim is going to get rich so that he can buy back the Red House at Widdiford, and then we are going to live in it, and it will be too sweet."

Aunt Caroline having grown incoherent with legitimate anger it devolved upon Cheriton to say something.

" Capital! " said he, in a most benevolent manner.

This expression of opinion helped Caroline Crewkerne through her crisis.

" You inconceivably foolish girl," said she. " Have you no sense of decency? "

" Muffin has p-r-r-romised to wear her mauve at the wedding," drawled Miss Perry.

Had not the husband-elect blown his nose very vigorously there is reason to fear that he would

again have been guilty of conduct unlike that of a Wargrave.

"Silence, girl!" said Aunt Caroline. "Don't speak another word until you have permission. This comes of crossing the breed. Now listen to me. The sooner you remove the man Lascelles from that inconceivably foolish and demoralized head of yours the better it will be for you. Where is your self-respect? Where is your sense of decency?"

"Muffin——" said Miss Perry, but she got no farther because an imperious finger stayed her.

"Don't speak," said Aunt Caroline. "Simply listen. Dismiss the man Lascelles from your mind, and try to remember who you are, and where you are, and what you are saying. My old friend Lord Cheriton desires to marry you. Understand that clearly. And he has my permission to do so. Understand that clearly also. Now you may say something."

Miss Perry took advantage of this gracious permission to turn to Lord Cheriton with a charmingly friendly smile upon her scarlet countenance.

"It is so dear of you, Lord Cheriton," she said, "and if I were not going to marry Jim I would marry *you*. Perhaps Muffin——"

Aunt Caroline affronted the nerves of Ponto by rapping sharply with her stick upon the floor.

"You have said sufficient," said she. "Dismiss the man Lascelles from your mind once and for all, You are going to marry Lord Cheriton. Is that quite clear?"

Apparently this was not quite so clear to Miss Perry as it was to Aunt Caroline. For that Featherbrain opened her eyes so widely that they seemed to acquire the color of violets, and a look of sheer perplexity settled upon her frank countenance.

"But if you don't mind, dearest Aunt Caroline," said she, "I p-r-r-romised to marry Jim."

Aunt Caroline began to storm.

"Is the girl a dolt!" she cried. "Has she no brains at all! Girl, have the goodness to listen once more. Your father, your brothers, and your sisters are all poor as mice, are they not?"

"Yes, dearest Aunt Caroline," said Miss Perry, quite simply.

"Very good. Now heed this carefully. By the terms of your marriage settlement, which I may say I have been able to arrange not without difficulty, you will become a countess with six thousand a year in your own right, with a house to live in, and your father or one of your brothers will have the reversion of a living worth eleven hundred a year which is in Lord Cheriton's gift. Now have you the intelligence to comprehend all that I have said to you?"

Apparently Miss Perry had. Doubtless her understanding was a slow moving and cumbrous mechanism which generally found infinite difficulty in assimilating the most obvious facts; but it was very difficult for the most obtuse person to misunderstand Caroline Crewkerne. Slowly but surely her hard lucidity percolated to the recesses of Miss Perry's mind; and just as slowly and as surely as it did, large

solemn tears welled into the eyes that had deepened to the color of violets. They rolled in ridiculous procession down the crimson cheeks.

Neither Caroline Crewkerne nor Cheriton was affected easily, but there was something in the solemn slow-drawn emotion of Miss Perry that imposed silence upon them. The silence that ensued was uncomfortable and by tacit consent it was left to Miss Perry herself to terminate it.

"It is so dear of you both," she said, "to be so good to me. I shall write to dearest papa about you, but I p-r-r-romised Jim."

Aunt Caroline snorted.

"And what do you suppose your father will say to you, you simpleton," said she, "when he learns what you have done? Now take my advice. Send the man Lascelles to me. I will deal with him. And then you must prepare to marry Lord Cheriton some time in October."

But Miss Perry sat the picture of woe. It is true that in the opinion of Cheriton she sat a perfectly enchanting picture of it; yet at the same time it gave him no particular pleasure to observe that the absurd creature was shedding real tears, tears which somehow seemed almost majestic in their simple sincerity.

Miss Perry was dismissed with strict instructions not to mention the subject to anyone.

"What a creature!" said Caroline Crewkerne, when the door had closed upon her niece.

She contented herself with that expression. As for Cheriton, he gave an amused shrug and said

nothing. For all his nonchalance perhaps he could not help feeling that he had been tempting Providence. Yet so ingrained was his habit of cynicism that it may not have occurred to him that he had anything to fear from Jim Lascelles. The young fellow had not a shilling in the world; he had a good head on his shoulders; and he had been brought up properly. That in such circumstances he should have taken the unpardonable liberty of offering to marry Caroline Crewkerne's niece was totally at variance with his knowledge of the world, and of human nature as he understood it.

Caroline Crewkerne was the first to speak.

"Cheriton," said she, "we are both of us old enough to know better. In the first place, you ought not to have brought that man to Hill Street; and in the second, I ought not to have allowed him to enter the house. However, the mischief is done. We must now take steps to repair it."

"I shall be interested, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, in his most agreeable manner, "to learn what the steps are you propose to take."

CHAPTER XXIX

JIM LASCELLES WRITES HIS NAME IN THE VISITORS' BOOK

THE husband-elect felt a perfectly legitimate curiosity concerning the course to be adopted in this crisis by this eminently worldly wise, hard-headed, and matter-of-fact diplomatist.

"Do you assure me positively that the man is a gentleman?" said Caroline Crewkerne.

Cheriton ruminated. The term, as he understood it and as Caroline interpreted it, was of a somewhat baffling complexity.

"Ye-es," said he, after an interval of unusually weighty reflection; "I should be inclined to say the young chap was by way of being one."

"As that is your opinion," said Caroline, grimly, "I shall speak a few words to him myself upon the subject."

Cheriton gave this determination the benefit of an ample measure of his consideration.

"My dear Caroline," said he, "it is either the worst thing you can do, or it is the best."

"I agree with you, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne. "And it all depends upon the man himself. Tell Burden to look him up in Walford."

Walford preserved so much discretion upon the subject of Jim Lascelles that, although several of his name were mentioned, neither he nor his forbears were singled out for special notice. The practical Caroline, having duly recorded the fact that "it was as she feared," desired to know whether Walford had anything to say upon the subject of his mother. However, as no one at Pen-y-Gros Castle was acquainted with the maiden name of Jim's mother, Caroline's curiosity in regard to her also had to go unsatisfied. Nevertheless, she had fully decided to speak to the presumptuous young man upon the subject.

To that end John was dispatched after dinner that evening to the lodgings of Mr. James Lascelles in Pen-y-Gros hamlet with the compliments of his mistress and the request that Mr. Lascelles would call at the Castle at noon on the morrow.

Mr. Lascelles sent back the information that he would be pleased to do so. Yet no sooner had the gate of the cottage clicked behind the emissary from the Castle than he repented, and it was only in deference to the wisdom of his mother that John was not recalled.

Jim's mother shook her head over him with sage indulgence.

"When will you learn, my son," said she, "that old ladies who live in Hill Street must be treated *au grand sérieux* by rising young painters who live at Balham?"

"Yes, old lady, I suppose so," said Jim, ruefully.

"And if one James Lascelles is ever to find the wherewithal to get back the Red House at Widdiford, he will have to learn to keep his tongue in his cheek and his back supple; and also learn how to stroke the fur of every old cat that ever stuck somebody else's coronet upon the panel of her carriage."

"For shame, my son!" said Jim's mother.

And she bestowed an embrace upon James which he really did not deserve.

Jim's powers of resentment were unchristian and did him no credit, but perhaps he would have shown less promise in his art had he been less susceptible to the rubs of the world. That is the best that can be said for him.

However, as the morning was wet, he did not mind so much that he was due at Pen-y-Gros Castle at noon. He put on his carefully brushed blue suit and the black-silk tie that his mother had knitted for him recently with her own fair hands, and at twelve o'clock precisely he was seeking admittance at the gloomy portals. As he did so he looked in vain for signs of the Goose Girl and the Muffin Girl. He could not help speculating as to what the old heathen wanted him for. Nothing pleasant, he would take his oath. Doubtless the Goose had blabbed. If so, a warm quarter of an hour was before him. Yet he felt that he should not mind that particularly. After all, the old beldame was quite likely to receive as good as she gave.

John received him, and handed him over to Mr. Marchbanks himself, who said, "Will you kindly

come this way, sir?" in the manner that he alone could say it.

Jim followed Mr. Marchbanks, after bestowing a somewhat contemptuous glance at a daub in the entrance hall which purported to be the work of one Tintoret. A little further along, however, was a Cavalier by Vandyck, which was more to his taste. He glanced at the furniture also, which in its way was magnificent. It was of embossed Spanish leather. At the head of the wide stone-flagged staircase up which he was conducted, was a *portière* of Gobelin tapestry. Passing through this, he was taken along a corridor containing good pictures and bad, and mediæval weapons and suits of armor, until at last he found himself in an extremely cozy room containing seductive lounges and strewn with Turkish mats. And there, seated alone and singularly upright in a high-backed chair, with a perfectly revolting little dog sleeping at her footstool, was the old woman Jim Lascelles so cordially disliked.

Jim was a little surprised that the old woman deigned to offer not two fingers only, but the whole of her hand.

"What is in the wind, I wonder?" mused Jim, as he accepted it with his best bow.

"It is good of you to come, Mr. Lascelles," said the old woman, by no means ungraciously. Remember there never was an old woman yet who could not contrive to be agreeable if she really made up her mind to be so. And Caroline Crewkerne was no exception to the universal rule. "Pray be seated," said she.

Jim Lascelles took the chair that was farthest from her ladyship.

The old woman was very concise, matter-of-fact, and businesslike. She spoke slowly, she enunciated her words with beautiful clearness; in short, she was a model of what you would expect her to be. She was all compact of hard-headed, clear-cut, practical sagacity.

" I wish to speak to you upon an important subject," she began. " It has come to my knowledge that you have been paying your addresses to my niece, Miss Perry."

Jim Lascelles was prepared for the speech in its substance, but its calm, matter-of-fact, non-committal air was baffling to him.

" In a sense, Lady Crewkerne, that is correct," said Jim.

The old woman nodded, not unamiably, however.

" It is a matter of regret to me that you should have done so," said she. " It is likely to be of grave prejudice to my niece."

" I am indeed sorry to learn that," said Jim, with excellent gravity.

" I will explain. My niece is a penniless girl, and I am given to understand, Mr. Lascelles, that you are yourself a young professional man with your way to make in the world."

" Your information is correct, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim, who was sufficiently impartial to admire the old woman's statesmanlike plainness.

" That being the case," she proceeded, " a union

between you is undesirable from my niece's point of view, and also from your own."

"I hope I am not entirely without prospects, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim, who, however, did not mention his prospects with any great depth of conviction.

"They belong to the future," said the old woman. "They will take time to materialize. I prefer to deal with the present."

"Miss Perry and I had not contemplated marriage just at present," said Jim.

"Quite so," said the aunt of Miss Perry. "It is sensible of you both not to do so."

The old woman's tone was devoid of irony, but the absence of it merely seemed to heighten the amount there was in her aspect of that undesirable quality. Jim thought he had never seen a human countenance that he liked so little.

"What I wish to point out to you," the old woman went on, "is that my niece has lately received an offer of marriage from a person who has excellent credentials."

From the first Jim had been expecting some such thunderbolt. Therefore he contrived to maintain his pose of scrupulously polite attention.

"As far as Miss Perry's well-being is concerned, I am glad to know that, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim, with an urbanity that did him great credit. "As far as my own is concerned, I deplore it."

"The offer of marriage my niece has received," said the old woman, "is of such a character that those who have her welfare at heart feel very strongly

that she is bound to entertain it. Not only will it give her an assured position socially, but also it will establish the fortunes of her family, which, as you are doubtless aware, are at a low ebb."

Jim gave a little nod to assure the old woman that he was not unacquainted with the fortunes of Miss Perry's family.

"In these circumstances, Mr. Lascelles," said she, briefly, "I think your course is clear."

Jim, however, assumed an air of perplexity.

"I wish, Lady Crewkerne," said he, "that I shared your opinion."

The old woman showed no acerbity.

"Have the goodness, Mr. Lascelles," said she, "to examine the matter in a rational light, from the point of view of a man of the world."

A short period was conceded to Jim Lascelles for the purpose of doing so.

"I suppose, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim, at the termination of the period, "you wish me to give her up?"

"I do," said the old woman.

Jim pondered a little. It was not very easy to give up the Goose Girl. But this uncompromising old heathen in her great head-dress, and installed in her state chair of embossed Spanish leather, had shown him his duty. And she had used the fewest possible words in contriving it.

"Your duty is perfectly obvious to my mind, Mr. Lascelles," said she, after a full minute of silence had passed.

" Ye-es," said Jim, drawing in his breath; " doubtless that is so."

Jim Lascelles took another minute to see if there was any way possible of circumventing his obvious duty. And then he rose from his chair.

" Lady Crewkerne," said he, " to-morrow my mother and I will leave the neighborhood. We thank you very much for the hospitality you have shown us."

Jim bowed gravely, and prepared to take his leave with the air of one who has performed a dignified action.

" Thank you, Mr. Lascelles," said the old woman, upon a note of veiled sarcasm, which yet was not so unpleasant as it might have been. " I am obliged to you. I shall be glad if you will write your name in the visitors' book."

In this fashion the audience terminated with a display of dignity upon both sides. Of course it was proper and natural that it should be conducted in this manner, considering where it was held. So much was clearly demanded by every detail of its surroundings. And in the hall Mr. Lascelles wrote his name in the visitors' book immediately below that of George Betterton, who had left Pen-y-Gros Castle the previous week.

CHAPTER XXX

GOOD-BY

BEFORE breakfast next morning Jim Lascelles said good-by to the Goose Girl on the slopes of Gwydr. It was an overwhelming day for that slow-witted, but tenaciously affectionate, creature. Muffin was leaving also by the eleven-o'clock train.

The eyes of Miss Perry were heavy with the tears she had wept, and with the tears she had still to weep. Prior to this tragic morning Jim Lascelles had not spoken to her upon the subject of Lord Cheriton, but the ruthless Aunt Caroline had very unceremoniously imbued her with a sense of duty. All too soon the golden age had ended. Somehow she felt that she would never climb the mountains again.

In obedience to Aunt Caroline's injunction she had told Muffin nothing of the tragedy. That practical-minded person and uncommonly sound sleeper had been awakened six times during the night by Goose's low sobs and convulsive caresses. On each occasion she had given Goose a hug in return, and told her not to be silly, and had immediately gone to sleep again.

When daylight came and Muffin discovered her sister's pink-and-white countenance to be puckered

with distress, that acute intelligence at once sought the remedy.

"I will stay with Aunt Caroline," said Muffin, "if she will have me, and you shall go back, Goose darling, to Slocum Magna to dearest papa. But if you do, you must promise to feed my rabbits, because Milly always forgets them. Now wipe your eyes, and don't be a silly."

Goose promised to feed the rabbits if she went back to Slocum Magna, but she felt sure that Aunt Caroline would not like her to.

Up till the departure of the eleven-o'clock train Araminta put forth great efforts to be brave; but she had had such little practice in the art, owing to having lived a life for the most part where little bravery was called for, that she did not wholly succeed. However, when she saw Jim Lascelles striding towards them over the mountains at a quarter past six, in response to his cheery, "Hallo, you there!" she contrived to greet him in something of the true Widdiford manner.

In the opinion of Jim Lascelles, the first thing necessary was to get rid of Muffin for an hour. And this was quite easy, for the devotion of that practical mind to the fauna and flora of the neighborhood often caused her to spend an hour in the investigation of a dozen square yards of the Welsh principality.

Upon this fateful morning less than a third of Gwydr had been ascended when a profusion of rare ferns and mosses claimed Muffin's attention. Jim

Lascelles walked forward briskly, with his hand firmly holding the docile sleeve of the Goose Girl.

"Come on," said Jim, with an affection of gayety that was most honorable to him. "Let us leave that Ragamuffin. In she goes, over her ankles into the mud. Torn a great piece out of her skirt on a brier. By the way, Goose Girl, has Aunt Caroline said anything to you upon the subject of Lord Cheriton?"

Mournfully enough the Goose Girl confessed that Aunt Caroline had.

"Well, you must buck up, you know," said Jim, cheerily. "You are going to be a countess, and the family of Wakefield—Slocum Magna, I mean—will come again into its own."

Miss Perry's only reply was to break forth into a succession of slow-drawn sobs, which were so heavy and majestic that Jim declared they shook the mountain.

"Here is a dry place," said he. "Let us sit down before you do some damage to the scenery."

They sat down together upon Gwydr, with the chill mists enfolding them. For twenty minutes the Goose Girl said nothing, but merely sobbed to herself slowly and softly with the daffodil-colored mane pressed against Jim's shoulder. Such depth and power had the Goose Girl's emotion that it really seemed to Jim Lascelles that, had her heart not been a particularly robust organ, it must have been broken in pieces.

"I am afraid," said Jim, rather miserably, "I

have been a bit of a cad for leading you on, you great silly Goose."

Miss Perry flung her arms about Jim's neck with such force and suddenness that she nearly toppled him backwards over a precipice.

"Jim," she sobbed, "you m-must m-marry M-Muffin."

As Jim was in the toils of a hug that almost forbade him to breathe, he was not able to reply immediately.

"That Ragamuffin!" said Jim, as soon as he was able to do so.

"She is such a s-sweet," sobbed Miss Perry.

"You Goose!" said Jim. "Give me a kiss, you great Goose."

Miss Perry proceeded to do so.

"That Ragamuffin doesn't know about it, does she?"

"Oh no," said Miss Perry. "Aunt Caroline said she was not to."

"That is a wise old woman. Quite right for the Ragamuffin not to know about it. She is too young. Now dry those Eye Pieces, Goose Girl, and don't be a silly. Old man Cheriton is a very nice, kind, fatherly old gentleman."

"He is a dear," said Miss Perry, with a loyalty that Jim was forced to admire.

"You are really a very lucky Goose, you know," said Jim. "You will have a nice, kind old gentleman to take you to parties and to the circus. He will give Buszard a contract for the large size, see if he

doesn't. And Dickie will get a living, see if he doesn't; and Charley will go to Sandhurst. As for Papa, you will be able to buy him the Oxford dictionary; Polly is as good as married to her parson; Milly can go to a boarding-school at Brighton; I am absolutely confident that the Ragamuffin will have a new mauve; and as for Tobias, he will be able to live in Grosvenor Square."

"Do you think so, Jim?" said Miss Perry, tearfully.

Jim Lascelles really covered himself with honor that unhappy morning upon Gwydr. For it is due to him to say that Aunt Caroline had knocked the bottom out of his little world. He had been tumbled out of his fool's paradise in such a ruthless fashion that he really did not know how he was going to get over the fall.

From his earliest youth he had had a sneaking fondness for the Goose Girl. He had bled for her, for one thing. And now that she had blossomed forth into this gorgeous being who had conquered the town, she had become so much a part of his fortunes that he found it impossible to dissociate them from her. The portrait he had painted of her had absorbed all he had had to give. It could never have been wrought unless something of her own magnificence had become part of him. Such a picture was composed of the living tissue of love. It was almost more than human flesh and blood could endure to be told in a few blunt words that the source of his inspiration must be a sealed fountain from that time forth.

However, he went through with his ordeal as well as in him lay. Great had been his folly that he had ever come to inhabit his paradise at all. And now that he was tumbled out of it, it behoved him to see that he made no cry over his bruises, if only because that other foolish simpleton was striving not to cry over hers.

The departure from the railway station at Dwygyfy was a seemly affair. The Castle omnibus, a contemporary of the Ark, brought Muffin in state. She was accompanied, of course, by Polly's dress-basket, marked "M. P." in white letters on a black ground; and was also accompanied by Miss Burden, Ponto, Lord Cheriton, and the dismal Goose. On the way they picked up Jim and his mother and their belongings, including the half-finished picture of The Naiad.

Muffin herself was in high feather. For the first time in her life she found herself a person of means and position. Aunt Caroline had marked her esteem for her character and conduct by presenting her with a bank-note for ten pounds. Muffin, with that practical sagacity which always distinguished her intercourse with the world, was at first very uncertain in what manner to convey this royal gift to Slocum Magna. Eventually she tore it in two pieces, placing half in each stocking.

The Goose Girl behaved with signal bravery upon the down platform at Dwygyfy. Jim wished at first that she had not come. But she contrived to restrain her feelings nobly, as of course was only to be ex-

pected of a Wargrave, a family which had gone so often to the scaffold. In consequence, they were able to snatch a few brief, inexpressibly sad, yet tender moments before the train arrived from Talyfaln.

"You are a good and brave Goose," whispered Jim, "and a lucky Goose too, you know. You must come sometimes to see us humble suburban people, and we will lay down a red carpet for you, and in every way we will do our best. Because, you know, you are going to be very grand."

"I don't want to be grand," said the Goose Girl, with whom tears were still very imminent.

"I have a great idea," said Jim. "Get old man Cheriton to buy the Red House at Widdiford, and then ask me and my old lady to come and stay with you for a fortnight. We will give them such a roasting at the Parsonage—especially that girl Polly—as they have not had lately."

Somehow this scheme of Jim's seemed to infuse a ray of hope in the forlorn heart of the Goose Girl.

"Jim," said she in a thrilling voice, "perhaps Lord Cheriton might buy the Red House for you and Muffin."

"Or perhaps pigs might fly," said Jim.

"You *will* marry Muffin, won't you? *P-r-romise* me, Jim, that you will."

"What is the good, you Goose, of my *p-r-romising* to marry the Ragamuffin? How do you suppose a poor painting chap, who lives with his old mother at Balham, can marry into a family with a real live

countess in it? What do you suppose that girl Polly would have to say upon the subject?"

This great idea, however, had insinuated itself into the Goose Girl's slow-moving and tenacious mind, and of course it stuck there.

"Jim," said she, just as the signal fell for the train from Talyfaln, and the solemn conviction of her tone was such that Jim hardly knew whether to laugh or to shed tears, yet hardly liking in public to adopt the latter course, decided in favor of the former; "Jim," said she, "I am sure Muffin would love to marry you. And she is such a sweet. I shall write to dearest papa about it."

Before Jim could make a fitting reply the train from Talyfaln came snorting and rattling in with a great display of unnecessary violence. Jim had to look after the luggage, while Lord Cheriton, with his accustomed gallantry, handed Jim's mother, her red umbrella, and her French novel into a third-class compartment. Muffin personally supervised the installation of Polly's dress-basket into the luggage van, and gave the porter twopence out of her chain purse.

"Get in, you Ragamuffin," said Jim, sternly, "or else you will be left."

Muffin gave her sister, who was forlornly witnessing these operations, a final hug and received one in return. She was then handed with considerable ceremony into the compartment which contained Mrs. Lascelles.

Jim gave sixpence to the porter, and then had a craving to kiss the Goose Girl, but did not quite know

how to manage it, as the down platform at Dwygyfy is such a public place. Therefore he had to be content with squeezing her hand.

"Now remember," was his parting injunction, "you are a very lucky Goose Girl indeed. And your papa and Polly and Milly and all of them are going to be awfully proud of you. And if you forget the Acacias at Balham, my old mother will never forgive you."

As Jim came aboard Cheriton shook his hand with real warmth.

"Good-by, Lascelles," said he. "I hope there will be some entertaining at Cheriton House one of these days. I hope I can count on you and your mother to stand by me. And when the masterpiece is *quite* finished let me know and I will tell you what to do with it."

The guard slammed the door and blew his whistle. As the train moved off the window of the third-class compartment was occupied by a wonderful yet substantial vision in mauve, waving affectionate farewells to a group of three persons and a small dog assembled on the platform. They all stood watching it, until the sunlight was cheated suddenly of the daffodil-colored mane gleaming from under the Slocum Magna cucumber basket by the jaws of the tunnel immediately outside Dwygyfy station, which is two miles and a quarter in length.

CHAPTER XXXI

DISINTEGRATION

FROM the moment that train steamed away from Dwygyfy there was no more decent weather. Day after day it thundered and lightened, it hailed and it blew; day after day it poured in torrents. For a whole week Cheriton endured this distemper of the Welsh climate, which according to Borrow is, in the most favorable circumstances, of a very fickle character. His man Johnson then packed up his traps, and the pair of them were spirited away upon an extremely inclement morning by the eleven-o'clock train. Scotland was their destination. In that land of cakes and heather were some old friends who set apart September for playing bridge for moderate stakes and for the shooting of grouse.

Of course before Cheriton went up to Scotland he freely discussed his proposed matrimonial adventure with the sagacious Caroline. She had not hesitated to affirm that the man Lascelles had behaved like a gentleman. It was only in extreme instances that she felt called upon to make a statement of that kind. It was a testimonial she did not give willingly, because in her opinion it was the highest there was to bestow upon the members of the sex to which the man Lascelles belonged.

As became a man of leisure, Cheriton was very leisurely in his methods. He did not propose to marry Miss Perry until the spring. Caroline was inclined to demur. She did not care to let the grass grow under her feet. Cheriton might change his mind, or a hundred things might happen. Stability at any rate was not his *forte.*

"No, my dear Caroline," said a sagacity that was in nowise less than her own, "the creature is a little undeveloped at present to my mind. A few months more of the great world in order that she may acquire a deeper sense of the responsibilities of the position will do her no harm. Besides spring, my dear Caroline, is the time for marriage. It is the vernal season. It is nature's own appointed wedding-day."

Caroline did not concur, of course. It only remained for her, however, to acquiesce ungraciously. Yet there was one thing she could do, and this she did. She sent for her lawyer to have the terms of the nuptial contract set out in form. Her old and trusted legal adviser, Mr. Giles Grabham, of Messrs. Pettigrew, Grabham, Grabham, and Horrobin, of Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, spent two nights and a day at Pen-y-Gros Castle, and placed the matter on a comprehensive basis. Cheriton appeared to derive a great deal of amusement from the whole proceeding. However, he was prevailed upon to attach what Mr. Grabham called "a provisional signature to the memorandum."

Divers copies were engrossed of what Mr. Grabham called "the instrument," by the clerical staff of

Messrs. Pettigrew, Grabham, Grabham, and Horrobin, one of which was duly forwarded to Lord Cheriton at Pen-y-Gros Castle, North Wales, two days after his lordship's departure from the Principality. It was accompanied by two others addressed to the Countess of Crewkerne.

Upon the receipt of these documents Miss Perry was commanded by Aunt Caroline to write to her papa to explain the signal honor that had been conferred upon her; and to inclose a copy of the deed of settlement for his inspection, sanction, and signature. In obedience to this command, with infinite labor and difficulty and many tears, Miss Perry composed the following:—

PAPA DEAREST,—*Aunt Caroline desires me to write to inform you that her old friend the Earl of Cheriton has done me the honor of wishing to marry me—that is, Papa Dearest, if you have no objection. Aunt Caroline desires me to say that in her judgment there can be no possible objection to Lord Cheriton, as he is very rich, his life has been worthy, and she has known him herself personally for more than sixty years. Aunt Caroline desires me to enclose this copy of the deed of settlement, which she hopes you will approve and return to her with your signature. With fondest love, Papa Dearest, and twelve kisses, which I enclose* xxxxxxxxxxxx, *Believe me to remain your most Dutiful and Affectionate Daughter*

ARAMINTA.

P.S. Have you any objection to Muffin marrying Jim Lascelles, who used to live at the Red House at Widdiford? It would be too sweet.

The more formal part of this production had been written to Aunt Caroline's dictation. She inspected the finished performance grimly. The writing was large and round and as transparently simple as Miss Perry's own countenance, and it was blotted freely with tears. In the fullest sense of the term it was a human document, and as such Aunt Caroline decided that it should be sent. Miss Perry was not the first Wargrave who had been consigned to the scaffold, and doubtless she would not be the last.

A week elapsed before a reply was received at Pen-y-Gros Castle, and even then the copy of the deed was not returned indorsed with the signature of the Reverend Aloysius Perry. His communication upon the subject was as follows:—

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—*Your letter came to me as a great surprise. Firstly, I should like to express to your Aunt Caroline the deep sense of obligation we all feel under in regard to her, not only in the matter of her very great kindness to you personally, but also for the great kindness and consideration she extended to Elizabeth during her month's sojourn at Pen-y-Gros Castle. Elizabeth cannot find enough to say in her praise.*

Now in regard to yourself, my dear Araminta,

while I recognize to the full the dazzling nature of your prospects, and I do not know in what manner to thank your Aunt for her princely suggestion, I want you to believe, and I want her to believe also, that I have no other thought and no other desire than that whatever line of action you embark upon shall lead to your ultimate and permanent happiness. That above everything is what I desire. I have refrained from attaching my signature to the deed of settlement which your Aunt has been so kind as to send to me, for while recognizing to the full her large-hearted generosity and her really princely munificence, I shall like to have your own assurance, my dear Daughter, that you are consulting your own highest welfare and happiness irrespective of that of anyone else. I trust your Aunt will not consider me lacking in gratitude or in practical common sense. Please write to me again upon the subject, and believe me to remain your affectionate father,

ALOYSIUS PERRY.

Aunt Caroline snorted a good deal when she read this letter. She declared it was so like a parson to say a great deal more than he need in order to express a great deal less than he ought. However, she was perfectly ruthless upon the subject. Araminta was ordered to allay the scruples of her father; and this the unhappy Goose Girl did, with many private tears, to her aunt's dictation.

In due course the document was returned with her father's signature. Then she felt that indeed her doom was sealed. She was a most docile and duteous creature, and even Aunt Caroline admitted it; but her appetite declined, her laughter lost its gayety, her youth its cheerful irresponsibility, and life became for her a heavy and listless routine.

Poor Jim Lascelles had his bad time too. He returned to the Acacias with his mother, fully determined to maintain his tripartite *rôle* of a Lascelles, a hero, and a gentleman. He determined to take the superhuman course of acting as though the Goose Girl had no place in his life whatever.

Alas for the vanity of human resolves! The first thing he did upon his return home was to take the key of his studio off the sitting-room chimney-piece in order to bestow a few final touches upon a work which by now was hardly in need of them. He deluded himself with the idea that the task was imposed in cold blood in order that he might prove to himself how strong he was, and that by the mere exercise of the will the image of the peerless original could be cut away from the living tissue of his thoughts.

Alas! it could not be done. Jim Lascelles failed dismally to assert the mind's dominion. A strange excitement overtook him, and for several days he worked in quite a frenzy of enthusiasm, modifying this, painting out that, enhancing the other. It was a dangerous kind of solace. He performed surprising feats, it is true; his color grew more and more audacious, only to be harmonized marvelously, but

he could not sleep at night. He came down to breakfast haggard and wild-eyed, and looking a degree more unstable than when he had retired in the small hours of the morning.

He had determined to withhold from his mother the true state of the case. But he had hopelessly underrated the *flair* of the genus. Very soon she had the truth out of him; and, without letting Jim see her concern, she grew alarmed for him. Yet she could confess to no surprise. From the first she had foreseen that this was a turn the thing must take almost inevitably. Had it not been Lord Cheriton, it must have been another. For the Goose, notwithstanding her limited capacity, was an absurdly regal creature; one of those oddly compounded, solemn, unaspiring masterpieces designed by nature for a gorgeous frame, who by a kind of inalienable right command a splendid destiny.

Jim's mother blamed herself, as mothers are so apt to do, although she really had no part in Jim's misfortune. She had merely lent a kind of whimsical countenance to the young fellow's ambitions, in order primarily to give him a zest in his work. The consequences entailed by the acquisition of that zest bade fair to become melancholy; but in any case the responsibility for laying the mine was not hers, any more than it was Cheriton's for applying the match.

"If it had not been one, laddie," said Mrs. Lascelles, philosophically, "it would have been the other. Had I prophesied, I should have said that destiny

would have made her a duchess. But either way, I don't think it matters. I feel sure that Lord Cheriton will be very good to her, although there is little consolation in that."

Precious little consolation, in Jim's opinion. By the time October came he was worn to a shade, and the masterpiece was finally completed. His mother was alarmed for him then. She suggested a voyage to Spain and a visit to the Prado, in order that he might pay homage at the shrine of the great Velasquez. The suggestion was a good one, but unfortunately it did not come within the range of practical politics. They had both spent all their money. Mrs. Lascelles had overdrawn her meager allowance, and Jim was in debt.

" Tell Lord Cheriton his picture is complete, and dun him for the price of it."

" No, old lady," said Jim, with a sad shake of the head; " we have to look to what we can raise on that little work to keep a roof over our heads during the winter."

His mother showed a most resolute optimism.

" Lay out every penny of the money on a visit to Spain," said she. " Velasquez will inspire you. You will return with a cubit added to your stature; you will finish The Naiad triumphantly, and, once you have done that, you will have convinced the world you can paint."

" And in the meantime, old lady, what about the *rint?* " said Jim.

" Oh, that," said his mother, airily—" that can

take care of itself. Besides, I dreamt last night that the publishers had accepted 'The Fair Immortal.'"

"That is not quite the same thing, señora, as receiving a check for it," said Jim, gloomily.

It would seem, however, that Providence was keeping its eye on the Acacias. For the very next morning brought a solution of the difficulty. The marquis wrote from Yorkshire to suggest that during the following week, if convenient to himself, Mr. Lascelles should come to Barne Moor, as previously arranged, to paint the fair Priscilla.

It appeared that in the stress of circumstance both Jim and his mother had forgotten the Yorkshire marquis and the fair Priscilla.

"And it means a cool five hundred, too," said Jim, with a little pardonable exultation. "The terms are already arranged, thanks to that old sportsman who is the oddest mixture of a human being I have ever met."

And then Jim gave a groan, for he remembered that it was upon the strength of this important commission he had made up his mind to take the plunge with the Goose Girl. The next moment he was cursing himself because his upper lip was so flabby.

"You will never be the least use in this world, James Lascelles, my son," was the burden of his reflections, "if you can't learn to take a facer or two. Every time they knock you down you have got to come up smiling, or you will certainly never be a Velasquez."

Mrs. Lascelles was overjoyed by the providential

letter from Yorkshire. She blessed the marquis and all his acres. She insisted that Jim should write by the next post to announce his intention of coming to Barne Moor on the following Monday. And, in order that there should be no possible doubt about the matter, she put on her hat, although it was raining hard, and sallied forth to the stationer's shop at the corner of Chestnut Road and invested one of her few remaining sixpences in Bradshaw's Guide.

CHAPTER XXXII

BARNE MOOR

ABOUT tea-time on the following Monday Jim Lascelles found himself at Barne Moor. The house was a bleak upstanding place in the north of Yorkshire. It was in a fold of the moors, and, although its size was impressive, it was architecturally hideous.

Jim had been very unhappy all the way up from London. The change of *locale*, however, raised his spirits a little. The contemplation of the five hundred pounds and a period of definite employment did something to help him also. And hardly had he set foot in the house than a great surprise was in store for him.

Almost the first person he saw was the Goose Girl. She had been out with the guns, and was now consuming tea and hot buttered cakes. It was nearly six weeks since they had parted in Wales. In that period each had changed. With his artist's eye Jim could not help noticing that she was still the elemental creature of the Devonshire lanes. Her candor and simplicity were not less than they were, but somewhere in her was a kind of reserved inclosure, an expanse of deep feeling hidden away, which only those who held her secret would ever be able to discover.

Perhaps Jim Lascelles was glad to notice it. It did honor to the slow-witted immobile creature, and it did honor to him. Yes, she was true blue. There was nothing in her words and very little in the manner of her greeting to suggest that a creature so primitive as herself had this reserved space in her. She was just as she always was, and yet at her first words of greeting Jim knew that she was much more.

"Why, it's Jim!" she exclaimed in just the old way; and putting her cake in her saucer, she said, "I can't shake hands with you, Jim, because my fingers are all over butter."

Jim hardly knew whether to rejoice at her presence or to be dismayed by it.

"Why, Goose Girl," said he, "whoever could have thought of seeing you here?"

"Aunt Caroline is here," said she, "and Miss Burden, and Lord Cheriton too."

"How strange that we should meet again like this!" said Jim, rather lamely.

Yet it was scarcely so strange as Jim thought it was. Aunt Caroline, in spite of her years and her increasingly difficult temper, still had certain houses open to her, and Barne Moor was one of them. Her store of energy was by no means exhausted; she liked still to keep in the world, to know what was doing; and she liked her rubber. It would not, perhaps, be strictly true to say that she was welcome at Barne Moor, but when Wales began to bore her she resolutely turned her face in that direction, because she knew that at that time Yorkshire would contain a

choice collection of her friends and her enemies, and would be infinitely more diverting than Pen-y-Gros Castle or London itself in the absence of Parliament.

At Barne Moor Jim of course was a nobody, and was treated as such. His hostess, who was of the strain of the former Whig oligarchy, like so many to be found under that ample roof, was not so much exclusive as she was indifferent to those outside the circle. She was a ponderous, neutral kind of woman, who bullied her husband and had very definite views about religion. From the first Jim Lascelles did not find her in the last easy to get on with. It must be confessed that he did not try to get on with her particularly.

Still, during the time Jim spent at Barne Moor things did not go amiss. The Goose Girl was still the child of nature she had always been. The old woman of Hill Street was reasonably civil; quite as civil, in fact, as Jim expected her to be. Miss Burden, in a curiously delicate manner, showed that she understood the tragedy. As for Cheriton, who was an old friend of the house, and for some reason high in the esteem of everybody, he extended the same genial kindness to him that he had always done.

The only other of Jim's acquaintances among the score or so people that were gathered under the hospitable roof of Barne Moor was George Betterton. No announcement had yet been made upon the subject, but it was common knowledge that " an arrangement " was likely to be forthcoming with a daughter of the house.

Jim Lascelles supposed that "the old sportsman" knew his own business best, but he rather hoped that "it wouldn't come off." In Jim's opinion "George was a genuine fellow," and Jim personally had not the least admiration for the fair Priscilla. For one thing he had to paint her to order; and that of course did not tell in her favor with the temperament of genius.

She had not the least sense of pose. She was just a wooden sort of Englishwoman, as neutral as her mother, who clipped her g's and powdered her nose, with dull red hair and pale green eyes, who took very little interest in anything or anybody. But she shot well and rode well, and went to church twice on Sunday.

She sat half a dozen times, and the rising artist did what he could with her. Jim's special talent lay in his color and his sense of values. He used the dark oak of the gloomy old library for his background, and he painted Priscilla's hair a warm and glowing Titian color, with a striking and distinguished pallor for the face; and for the eyes a shade of blue which was extremely daring but successful. The picture in its style and its distinction was absurdly unlike Priscilla herself; yet somehow it was sufficiently like her to pass muster with those who cared more for Priscilla than they did for her counterfeit presentment.

About the fifth day of Jim's sojourn Cheriton announced that the picture of Priscilla was going to turn out very fine. He exhorted Kendal publicly to

send it to the next Royal Academy, and complimented him upon having had the foresight and good sense to obtain the man of the future to do the work. The bullet-headed Yorkshireman was pleased, of course, since every bullet-headed Yorkshireman likes to be complimented on his foresight and good sense by an acknowledged expert.

"I wonder if he would paint my wife," said Mr. Crosby of the Foreign Office.

"You can ask him, my dear fellow," said the expert.

"Would he want a stiff figure?" said Mr. Crosby, who had a very practical mind.

"It would cost you a cool thousand, I dare say," said Cheriton, before Kendal could announce that it had cost him five hundred.

"Stiff, ain't it, for an unknown man?" said Mr. Crosby.

"He is going to be *the* man, my dear fellow," said Cheriton. "What do you say, Caroline? You have seen some of his work."

"I agree with you, Cheriton," said the flattered Caroline, who knew as much about pictures as Ponto did. "He has painted two of my nieces, and in my opinion they are excellent likenesses."

"Have you two nieces, Caroline?" said the Marquis. "That is interesting. When are we to have the opportunity of seeing the other one?"

"Next season—perhaps."

As yet there had been no formal announcement of Cheriton's engagement, but it was known to many.

It is true that those who were best acquainted with him maintained an attitude of incredulity. So many times in the past had there been talk of entertaining at Cheriton House. Yet there was a consensus of opinion that he really meant to settle down at last; and while all disinterested people could not fail to admire his taste, the critical were a little inclined to doubt his wisdom. Still, there was no doubt about the beauty and the docility of his choice, and in her quaint way she had unmistakably the *bel* air. She was a good honest girl, a Wargrave, and the old woman of Hill Street could well afford to do something in the matter. Still, the knowing ones "could not see it at all"; those who were not so knowing thought that "Cheriton might have done worse."

All the same, Miss Perry was famous and she was popular. Her simplicity was something that was growing very rare; she was unaffectedly good to everybody, and everybody could not help being grateful to her for her goodness, because it sprang straight from the heart. No matter whether people were important or unimportant, it made no difference to her. Great beauty and an absolute friendliness which is extended to all, which keeps the same gracious smile for the odd man about the stables that it has for the wearer of the Garter, will go far towards the conquest of the world.

Miss Perry had conquered her world. All agreed that Cheriton had done well. Yet the creature was not in the least happy. So much practice, however, had the Wargraves had in the course of the centuries

in dissembling their unhappiness and in offering their heads to the block, that only four persons were able to suspect that a brave, smiling, and bountiful exterior concealed a broken heart.

Jim Lascelles was one. He knew for certain. Miss Burden was another. Caroline Crewkerne was no believer in broken hearts. For one thing, she had never had a heart of any sort to break. But she had seen those great damp splotches on the correspondence with her father, she had noticed that the creature's appetite was not what it was; and there were half a dozen other symptoms that enabled her to put two and two together. As for the fourth person, it was Cheriton himself. He was a man of immense practical sagacity. The Lascelles affair was perfectly familiar to him in all its bearings. He himself was primarily responsible for it. And none knew better than did he that youth will be served.

During Jim's stay at Barne Moor, Cheriton went out of his way to show him consideration. He behaved like a habitually courteous and broad-minded man of the world, who, so to speak, knew the whole alphabet of life, and if necessary could repeat it backwards.

"You have no right to be here, my dear fellow," he said tacitly to Jim Lascelles; "but since my Yorkshire friend, Kendal, has blundered, as one's Yorkshire friends generally do, and you find yourself in the wrong galley, behave just as you would under ordinary circumstances, and, if you have the courage, take up the parable more or less where you left it.

After all, you were brought up together, and I am only an interloper, and an old one at that."

It was bold and it was generous of Cheriton to take this course. But the young fellow Lascelles had behaved so well that he was bound to respect him. And he had a genuine liking for him too. Therefore he raised no objection to their spending long hours upon the moors with only one another for company, while he gossiped and shot birds, and fribbled and idled away his time indoors among more mature persons.

Still, it was trying Jim Lascelles somewhat highly. The test was a severer one than perhaps Cheriton knew. For Jim was confident that he had only to speak the word for the Goose Girl to marry him by special license at Barne Moor parish church. Once, indeed, they found themselves in it, since the Goose Girl was by way of being a connoisseur in churches; and they had a pleasant and instructive conversation with the vicar.

However, all's well that ends well, as Shakespeare informs us. Jim Lascelles did not obtain a special license, but returned to his mother like a good son and, shall we say, a man of honor. For it would have been such a fatally easy and natural thing to marry the Goose Girl at Barne Moor parish church. If you came to think about it, why should she be offered for sacrifice? Dickie, of course, would be able to go to Sandhurst, and Milly would be able to go to the boarding school; but all the same, it was desperately hard on the Goose Girl.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

JIM LASCELLES returned to Balham exactly nine days after he had left that friendly but uninspired suburb. He had worked hard during his absence in Yorkshire; the picture of the fair Priscilla had made excellent progress, and there was a check for five hundred pounds in prospect on completion. Further, by the interest and undoubted talent for commerce of his friend Lord Cheriton, Mr. Crosby of the Foreign Office had been induced to rise to seven hundred and fifty pounds for the portrait of Mrs. Crosby and her children.

So far as the things of this world were concerned, Jim really returned to his mother in high feather. The progress he was making in his profession he felt was out of all proportion to his talent. But it is a great thing to have a friend at court. So much is done in that way. It is not always the best picture, or the best oratorio, or the best play, or the best novel that makes the most guineas in the market-square. It is one thing to create a masterpiece, and it is another to translate it into pounds, shillings, and pence. There can be no doubt that Jim Lascelles had made amazing strides in his art; but all the same, he was

a lucky fellow to have a man like Cheriton to go round with a bell to call the attention of the picture-buying public to the quality of his work.

Jim Lascelles would have been less than human had he not been immensely grateful to Cheriton. And yet he would not have been human either had he not hated him very sorely. After all, what is the use of material prosperity if the man who confers it upon you robs you of the only girl in the world you feel you will ever be able to marry? Certainly he would now have the means to buy his mother a new frock or so in order to deprive her of her favorite excuse for not looking older. But life, even with professional success, was going to be a hollow business.

However, Jim Lascelles contrived in this crisis to behave with a discretion that was very creditable to his character. He had gone down to the depths of late, and, as is often the case with such divers in deep seas, he had brought up a few pearls. One of these was resolution. He finished the picture of Priscilla out of hand and drew his check; and although the season was November, he paid several visits to Eaton Square and did his best for Mrs. Crosby and her youthful family. And ever and anon he took his courage in his hands and spent an hour in further devotion to the masterpiece that was to make him famous.

It was not until early in January that Jim Lascelles made the announcement to his patron that the portrait of Miss Perry was complete. Thereupon quite a number of people interested in art found their

way to the Acacias. They were by no means unanimous in their opinion regarding its intrinsic merit, but they all agreed that it was bound to prove one of the sensations of the year.

"An extraordinarily clever fake," said a critic of the fine arts privately.

"Mr. Lascelles," said a dealer, "I should like you to give me an option on all the work you produce during the next five years. I feel sure I could sell it."

"We have a new Gainsborough here," said a third person, who spoke in an unofficial capacity, "and that is all there is to be said about it."

About the end of the month Cheriton himself appeared, duly armed with expert opinion, to see for himself. He was accompanied by Miss Burden and his *fiancée*, who was looking thin and unhappy. It was a beautiful day for the time of year; and in regard to his appearance, the happy wooer was as fastidious as usual. Never had he seemed more faultless in his attire or more scrupulously paternal in his demeanor. He looked long at the masterpiece, and he looked particularly.

"Lascelles, my good fellow," said he, "I am forced to arrive at one conclusion. If you were to paint a thousand pictures, this is something you will never surpass."

"Why do you think so?" said Jim.

"Because, my dear fellow, there is growth in it. You began it a callow stripling; you have finished it, shall I say, a strong man in the plenitude of his power. I have watched you and the picture grow

together from month to month. It is given to no man to do that sort of thing twice."

Jim Lascelles, however, was a robust young fellow—at least, it was his ideal to be so. He was apt to be on his guard against high-flown sentiment, yet he knew that Cheriton had spoken the truth.

"You are right," he said simply. "That canvas has got all I have or all I ever shall have. I am older now than when I began it, and I hope I'm wiser."

"Not wiser really, my dear fellow; we never get wiser. But you have found yourself. A great career lies before you."

"You may be right," said Jim, "or you may not be right, but either way it doesn't matter."

Cheriton inspected the young fellow with the greatest coolness and impartiality. There was no mistaking that the words were tragic. Cheriton's penetration declared them to be so. He took some little time for reflection, and then he slowly drew a check out of his pocket-book with an air that was really unfathomable.

"There must be no misunderstanding, Lascelles," said he, with an air that was brisk and businesslike. "There is every reason to believe that the picture of Miss Perry will prove a valuable property. But at the same time, I hold your promise that I may purchase it on my own terms. Is not that the case?"

"It is, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, with indifference.

"I hope the bargain I drove with you may not prove too hard," said Cheriton, with an enigmatic

smile that Jim Lascelles took not the least pains to fathom. "But if I may say so, your conduct in allowing me to drive such a bargain was curiously injudicious. For everybody tells me that your picture is magnificent."

"I don't think it matters," said Jim, who was looking tired. "Although one is glad you like it, of course."

"It must always be pleasant to the artist to have his work admired. My own comment upon your work is this. I hope, my dear fellow, you will be able to forgive its extravagance."

As he spoke he gave the check to Jim Lascelles. The painter, however, paid no heed to it at first. His instinct was to crush it in his hands and fling it away, so repugnant was the piece of paper to the touch. Now that the time had come to part with the sole remaining solace he possessed, he felt unable to yield it.

This, however, was a weakness he must not indulge. He looked at the paper perfunctorily, and then he gave a little exclamation. The check was made out in his favor for ten thousand pounds.

"I don't understand," said Jim. "Is there not some mistake?"

"You must constrain your modesty a little, that is all," said Cheriton. "People tell me it will be worth every penny of this sum to the next generation. It is pleasant sometimes to anticipate the verdict of posterity."

Jim Lascelles did not know how to act or what

to say. In his judgment this was the most Quixotic proceeding he had ever encountered.

"Really, Lord Cheriton," he said, "I don't feel that there are sufficient grounds upon which I can accept such a sum as this."

"A bargain is a bargain," said Cheriton. "I hold your promise that I am to purchase the picture on my own terms."

In the flood tide of his bewilderment Jim Lascelles had perforce to remain silent.

"Don't forget, my dear Lascelles, that the highest pleasure that is given to any man is to adopt the *rôle* of Mæcenas. And are you aware that the Red House at Widdiford is in the market, and that six thousand pounds will purchase it?"

Jim flinched a little. A deep flush overspread his face. This was sacred ground, upon which it behoved the outside world to tread warily.

"I hope you don't mean that the Red House at Widdiford means nothing to you?"

Jim was not proof against the assault.

"I'm not sure that it does," he said miserably.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that if I were you."

Jim began to look decidedly fierce. In spite of the check for ten thousand pounds, which he viewed as somewhat in the nature of a mockery, he showed no disposition to be baited.

"Perhaps it would be wise, Lord Cheriton, not to pursue the subject."

Cheriton laughed outright at the solemnity of the young fellow's manner.

"On the contrary," said he, "one feels that the subject of the Red House at Widdiford should be discussed at length. Miss Perry and I have been over to look at the old place before completing the purchase."

"Ah! that is interesting," said Jim, who was more bewildered than ever.

"It seems that, in addition to its other lures, the Red House at Widdiford has peaches in season."

"Of course it has," said Jim, who was beginning to feel that Cheriton was making a rather long excursion in the realms of bad taste.

"Well, my dear fellow, I put it to you—what is the use of having peaches in season if one has not the appetite to eat them?"

"What, indeed!" said Jim.

"And again, my dear fellow—what, pray, is the use of giving Buszard a contract for the large size when cream buns lose their savor?"

Jim made no reply, but merely looked miserable.

"Let me tell you in confidence, Lascelles," said his patron, in a becomingly low tone, "that even the circus has begun to pall. And as for Joseph Wright of Derby, the question of his permanent merit is beginning to appear almost a matter of indifference. Do you feel competent to give advice in regard to what ought to be done?"

"I am afraid I don't, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, rather feebly.

"That is disappointing, for in the past you have shown such a surprising fertility of ideas and re-

sources. The problem is so serious. Can one conceive a world in which cream buns have no savor, circuses no glamor, and in which the Joseph Wrights of Derby are allowed to ruffle it unquestioned among their betters? Frankly, the feat is beyond me, Lascelles. And then, too, my dear fellow, the news that Muffin is to have a new mauve from London to wear in the spring has excited hardly any enthusiasm."

"Indeed?" said Jim.

"That is so, I assure you. And to my mind, that is not the least sinister symptom. I have conferred with the wise woman of Hill Street, and during my sojourn in the west country also with the presiding genius of Slocum Magna. And after some discussion of the pros and cons of the situation, for *mon père* and *ma tante* do not appear to see eye to eye in all things, we are at last in agreement that something ought to be done to restore the savor to the best confectionery, and also to insure that no upstart shall occupy without question the same kind of *fauteuil* as Rembrandt and Velasquez. The result of our deliberations is, my dear fellow, that we have come to the conclusion that you are the man to help us."

"I!" said Jim, impotently.

"Have you any objection to undertaking such a scheme of philanthropy?"

"If I could do anything to add to Miss Perry's happiness," said Jim, "I should be just about the proudest chap in the world."

"Well, it seems, my dear fellow, that you can do

so. At least, that is the opinion that has been arrived at by the experts who have communed over her case."

Jim's heart beat painfully.

"Tell me what I can do," he said rather hoarsely, "for the best, the truest-hearted, the most absolutely genuine girl in the world."

"You can marry her."

"Marry her?" said Jim, weakly.

"Yes, in the afternoon of April the First, at Saint Sepulchre's Church."

"But——" said Jim.

"The oracle of Hill Street thinks the First of June is preferable, because there will be more people in town, and the presents are likely to be more numerous. But personally I agree with Mrs. Lascelles and *mon père* that April is as good a time as any other for visiting the Prado."

"But——" said Jim.

"I forget the inn I stayed at when I was last at Madrid. It was 'El' Something, and for some obscure reason it had no aspirate. But one Ford is the authority for Spain, although, to be sure, a certain Borrow wrote a famous work upon the subject. By the way, we must not overlook one important argument in favor of June."

"What is it?" said Jim, mechanically.

"It is hardly right to expect a new mauve to make its *début* on the First of April. Yet there seems no help for it. No ceremony could possibly be considered complete without it."

"Am I to understand——?" said Jim, who

stopped with ridiculous abruptness right in the middle of his question.

" By the way, my dear fellow, I have taken the liberty of suggesting to your accomplished mother that it might help her literary career if she moved a little nearer to the center. A little flat in Knightsbridge might be a judicious investment. As you may be aware, publishers as a race are highly susceptible, and an address in Knightsbridge might favorably impress them."

" Do you think so? " said Jim, who did not know in the least what he was saying.

But there is really no reason to persist in this history. In spite of scruples, which were as much due to pride as to generosity, Jim Lascelles married the Goose Girl at Saint Sepulchre's Church on the First of April. On that significant occasion the presiding genius of Hill Street displayed an amount of Christian feeling which, in the opinion of a contemporary, was without parallel in his experience.

The entire family of Slocum Magna, including Milly, whose pigtail was the color of a yellow chrysanthemum, and was tied with a ribbon, came up to London and stayed a whole week at Morley's Hotel. Among other things, they all went one day to see the Exhibition, and found there wasn't one. Papa dined twice in Hill Street, and met dukes and people; and he brought back the report that Aunt Caroline was less worldly than he had feared she was. He gave his daughter away on the glorious First; and Muffin wore her new mauve on that occasion. In the opinion

of all qualified persons it was quite as successful as the peerless original. Polly, who took after her papa, and had more intellect than all the rest of the family put together, Dickie and Doggo included, looked charmingly proper in a " costume " more reticent than Muffin's. Her young man assisted the Dean of Dunstable, the uncle of the bride, in performing the ceremony.

Jim Lascelles and the Goose Girl spent a month in the land of Cervantes and Velasquez. They are living now at the Red House at Widdiford. Jim is quite likely to be elected to an Associateship of the Royal Academy before long. At least, he is getting very good prices for his work, and his " Miss Perry " has been esteemed a rare triumph for British art. His " Naiad " also, purchased by the Chantrey Bequest, has been generally and justly admired.

The accomplished mother of the rising artist took the disinterested advice of a well-wisher, and a fortnight after her son's brilliant marriage—the *Morning Mirror* described it as such—she left " P.P.C." cards on the Miss Champneys at the Chestnuts, and moved " nearer to the center." It may have been coincidence, or it may have been cause and effect, but within a fortnight of her installation at No. 5, Beaufort Mansions, W., " The Fair Immortal " was accepted on a royalty by an eminent firm of publishers, and made its appearance in the course of the summer. It won such unanimous approval from the Press and the public, that it can now be purchased for sixpence of any self-respecting bookseller in the

United Kingdom; its fortunate authoress has signed contracts for work for the next three years and has been elected a member of three of the best ladies' clubs in the metropolis.

Muffin's season at Hill Street was an even greater triumph than her sister's—but thereby hangs a tale for a wet afternoon. Aunt Caroline, in spite of her advanced years, is worth " a good many dead ones " at present, and in the opinion of her oldest friend her manner has more amenity. Perhaps it is that the influence of youth has been a good one in her life. It is right to think so since there is no reason to believe that she has altered her opinion of the clergy.

Polly has not yet married her parson, but she is certain to do so. Serious people, however, " make haste slowly," as the wise Italians say. It is well that they should. Charley has found his way to Sandhurst all right, and feels himself to be a field-marshal already. Dickie has lately been presented to a living worth eleven hundred a year—a really preposterous emolument, considering the widespread depression in things ecclesiastical. However, in justice to Dickie, it should be stated that he was always quietly confident that something would come of his left-arm bowling. And so it ought if you break both ways.

Milly has been two terms already at her Brighton boarding school. In the opinion of her mistresses she is the best inside right at hockey on the South Coast. If she is not chosen to play against Wales

in the forthcoming international match she will be much disappointed.

Entertaining at Cheriton House is still to seek. The thing threatens to become a national scandal. Comparisons, highly unfavorable to the present peer, are being constantly drawn by convinced free-fooders and the praisers of past times. The noble earl, however, is fully occupied at present in steering a course between the Scylla of Hill Street on the one hand, and the Charybdis of No. 5, Beaufort Mansions on the other. The presiding genius of the former locality, however, defines a coxcomb as a person who never means anything. Still, it doesn't do to be too sure in these days.

As an instance of the need for honest doubt, George Betterton did not lead the fair Priscilla to the altar after all. The world understood that a religious difference was the rock which sundered them. Whether George had too little religion and Priscilla had too much, is one of those things that has never been elucidated clearly. But, beyond all shade of controversy, they were never brought to the question. Priscilla made quite a good marriage, all the same. As for George—well, what really happened to him is a story for one of those typical English afternoons in which it is really not fit for a dog to be out. People say that George is much improved lately.

In conclusion, we feel bound to record our opinion that it is gravely to be doubted whether Jim Lascelles will make as great a painter as Velasquez. Considering his youth, his attainments, and his temper, we

were among those who predicted a high destiny for the young fellow, but that was before "the wicket rolled out so plumb." Authorities upon the subject are not slow to inform us, however, that it is better to marry the girl you want to, and to live at the Red House at Widdiford, and be a county magistrate, and to have a couple of expensive sons in the Services, and to have your girls dressed by Redfern and presented at Court, than to appear on a pedestal by public subscription in front of the National Gallery three centuries after you have ceased to take an interest in the verdict of posterity.

Quot homines tot sententiæ. These wiseacres may be right, or they may not be right. It is only the Caroline Crewkernes who are infallible.

THE END

// GOOD FICTION

ANONYMOUS **SAPPHO IN BOSTON**

A dainty and brilliant novel by a writer of long experience. Scene, Boston and England. Period, to-day. Illustrated. $1.50.

JOHN LUTHER LONG'S **FELICE**

Mr. Long has never written a more charming story than this tale of Italian life in Philadelphia. Illustrated in colors. $1.00.

THOMAS L. MASSON'S

THE VON BLUMERS

A sparkling picture of American life in the suburbs of New York, full of insight and penetrating, unostentatious humor. Illustrated by Bayard Jones. $1.50.

ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER'S

WHERE SPEECH ENDS

A novel of the orchestra which takes the reader into complete comradeship with the men who interpret the world's greatest music in the world's greatest way. $1.50.

CONSTANCE SMEDLEY'S **THE DAUGHTER**

A vigorous, likable novel of the modern suffrage movement in England. Has an extremely interesting plot, and moves rapidly from the start. 12mo. $1.50.

CONFLICT

An unusually strong and fascinating story of English life in some of its most up-to-date phases. Depicts a modern business woman in a modern environment. $1.50.

ALICE McALILLY'S

THE LARKINS WEDDING

"An apotheosis of good humor and neighborly kindness."—*The Outlook.* 24 illustrations. $1.00.

MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
NEW YORK

GOOD FICTION

EDEN PHILLPOTTS'S

THE VIRGIN IN JUDGMENT

Mr. Phillpotts never wrote a finer, sounder novel of Dartmoor than this. It has characters that will live long. 12mo. $1.50.

J. C. SNAITH'S

WILLIAM JORDAN, JUNIOR

"The most moving and fascinating piece of work the author of 'Broke of Covenden' has yet given us."—*Contemporary Review* (London). $1.50.

JOHN TREVENA'S **FURZE THE CRUEL**

"It is always difficult to define what constitutes greatness in any form of art, but when greatness exists it is easy to discern. This is a great book—almost a masterpiece."—*London Academy.* $1.50.

ELIZABETH ROBINS'S

THE MILLS OF THE GODS

One of Miss Robins's most finished and brilliant stories. Its flavor is almost medieval in quality, though the period is to-day. A superbly artistic story of Continental life. 12mo. $1.00.

ANNULET ANDREWS'S

THE WIFE OF NARCISSUS

"A stroke of genius."—*Hartford Courant.*

"Instinct with spring-like romance."—*Chicago Record-Herald.* 12mo. $1.50.

ELEANOR TALBOT KINKEAD'S

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Rises to fine heights and is inspired by fine ideals."—*New York Tribune*,

"A gripping, brainy story, revealing an artist in literature of decided promise."—*Boston Herald.* Illustrated. $1.50.

The COURAGE of BLACKBURN BLAIR

"The characterization is markedly good, various men and women standing out like clear portraits. Best of all, perhaps, the whole exhales a subtle aroma of delicate romance and passion."—*Chicago Record-Herald.* 12mo. $1.50.

LE
S669ar

196116

Author Snaith, John Collie

Title Araminta.

University of Toronto
Library

DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File"
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU